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## Official Magazine - Australia

ISSUE 65 FEBRUARY 2012  
100% Australian Content

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**CHALLENGER!**

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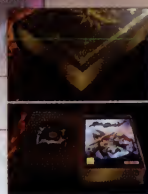


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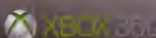


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**OPS** heads to snowy Edmonton, Canada, to get you the very latest on Bioware's space opera epic.

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Strange name, awesome game.

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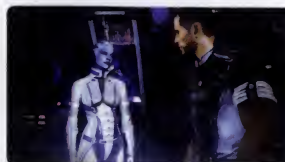
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## Meet the team



### Paul Taylor

#### Deputy Editor

**Driver:** San Francisco was brilliant, but *Portal 2* left me an emotional wreck, making it my GOTY.

**Playing:** *Binary Domain*

**Wanting:** *Syndicate*



### Stephanie Goh

#### Art Director

**GOTY?** *Portal 2*. Sheer brilliance and really funny! Co-op was great too.

**Playing:** *Skyrim*

**Wanting:** *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*



### Dan Staines

#### Acting Senior Writer

On my 4th run of *ME2* (GOTY). This is my totally-for-realies canon game that I'll import into *ME3*.

**Playing:** *Mass Effect 2*

**Wanting:** *Mass Effect 3*



### James Cottee

#### Contributor

Stargazing as I imagine the original Sputnik beeping its way around the atmosphere. Up Sputnik!

**Playing:** *Skyrim*

**Wanting:** *Yakuza: DS*



### James Ellis

#### Contributor

Currently taking a break from being obsessed with *Battlefield* to be obsessed with *Skyrim*.

**Playing:** *Skyrim*

**Wanting:** *Mass Effect 3*



### Nathan Lawrence

#### Contributor

Plotting out how much time I have to finish this year's games before next year's start to hit.

**Playing:** *Battlefield 3*

**Wanting:** *Syndicate*



### Dave Kozicki

#### Contributor

Screw shooter multiplayer, I'm in love with the strategic elements of *Warhawk's* spiritual successor, *Starhawk*.

**Playing:** *Warhawk Beta*

**Wanting:** *Syndicate*



### Toby McCasker

#### Contributor

Bucket-heading my way to a place in the Hall of the Idiot, population moi. I love you *Skyrim*.

**Playing:** *Skyrim*

**Wanting:** more buckets



### Angry Sackboy

#### Contributor

So, *Syndicate* isn't coming out in Australia? Guess I'll nip over the Tasman to a country with some sense.

**Playing:** *Skyrim*

**Wanting:** *Syndicate*

## Editorial



If there's one thing our censors hate, it's corpse abuse. If you ever make a game and you're thinking of features to drop in – swear button, nude code, what have you – for the love of God *don't* put in post-death mutilations. Fictional cadavers have rights too.

But here's the thing: like all lines of political correctness drawn by our schizophrenic censors, it snakes crazily. With *Dead Space 2's* necromorphs you can fricassee their forms to your heart's

content – hell, the game flat out suggests you rip bits off. Honestly, when I'm playing a game I don't make the distinction between 'dissection of reanimated dead humans' and 'regular dead humans'.

I'm not slicing up a human anything. I'm a hand with a gun mowing down targets that are preventing me from getting to the end credits and a trophy. So if I slog my way through a hundred whatevers and feel the need to stop and keep blasting them, what's the big deal? A polygonal henchman doesn't have a name, let alone a polygonal wife who'll need to be called in to try and identify which polygons are his by squinting at the reddened textures.

I don't feel one iota of remorse for what I do in a game because it's a nonsense fantasy. The polygons I just divided by five may as well have been a space invader separating into a five pixel explosion. Also, through the power of checkpoints, that cloned construct *just killed me six times* before I finally stopped it. At that point I think I'm entitled to some reparations.

But that's my personal view of things – the view of a man who watched enemies evolve over decades from gibberish dots to AI driven humanoids. I love gaming and by default my brain will make me defend it, no matter the charge. But the fact is I'm not a current-day kid starting to play in an age where everything on the screen looks like everything off the screen.

That's certainly a thought-provoking difference worthy of debate (possibly on our Facebook page), but I think the better conversation should be "where the hell is our R18+ rating?" The last forecast I was given was "it'll be a couple of years" and that's absolutely pathetic. I'm not losing faith in society because games are creating child psychotics. That's not happening, I'm losing faith because the people running said society take 10 years to pull their thumb out of their butts to enact change, all because they don't understand "the videoed games".

That is happening.

### Adam Mathew

#### Editor

**Playing:** *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*

**Wanting:** *Syndicate*

## SPEAK WITH US!

Love the mag? Hate the mag? We want your opinions and questions on *OPS*, on games – on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins the Game of the Month! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:



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**TURN TO PAGE 32**

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# insider

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# Syndicate to be hacked to pieces?

Another frustrating chapter in Australian censorship opens...

Refused classification. It's a nightmare phrase most Australian gamers dread to hear when used in the same sentence as their favourite upcoming game. At the time of writing it appears as though EA and Starbreeze Studio's *Syndicate* reboot has fallen prey to our country's somewhat random ban-hammer.

Here's why, according to the official report: "[there's] an intense sequence of violence commences when a player collect a 'g290 minigun', which operates much like a Gatling gun. A player moves through a building rapidly firing at enemy combatants. Combatants take locational damage and can be explicitly dismembered, decapitated or bisected by the force of the gunfire. The depictions are accompanied by copious bloodspray and injuries are shown realistically and with detail. Flesh and bone are often exposed while arterial sprays of blood continue to spurt [sic] from wounds at regular intervals."

Apparently the carnage continues visually after the enemies have been killed in the game.

"The game also allows a player to repeatedly damage enemy combatant's corpses. This is shown in realistic depictions. For example, it is possible for a player to decapitate a corpse with a headshot before individually blowing off

each of its limbs. Depending on the weapon used, it is also possible to bisect a corpse, with realistic ragdoll effects noted. The depictions are again accompanied by arterial sprays of blood and detailed injuries that include protruding bone.

"In the opinion of the Board, the game contains intense sequences of violence which include detailed depictions of decapitation and dismemberment that are high in playing impact. The game also contains the ability to inflict repeated and realistic post mortem damage which exceeds strong in playing impact. It is therefore unsuitable for a minor to see or play and should be Refused Classification pursuant to item 1(d) of the computer games table of the Code."

What will happen to *Syndicate* now depends on EA Australia. If they decide to appeal the decision and resubmit the game for another run at classification it could still see the light of day here in Oz. If it manages to reach such a compromise (either by talking around the problem, or editing the content to make it more palatable) it will join the ranks of the following titles: *Aliens vs. Predator*, *Fallout 3*, *F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin*, *GTA III*, *House of the Dead: Overkill Extended Cut*, *Shellshock: Nam '67* and *The Punisher*.

If EA is unwilling to alter the game to suit our censor's paradoxical, crybaby tastes it'll join the listed of the damned and banned, along with titles like: *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*, *Manhunt*, *Mortal Kombat*, *NARC*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Shellshock 2: Blood Trails* and *Getting Up*.

## In Short

A brief look at this month's news



- ▶ Bethesda acknowledges that it's downloadable *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* fixes "need more care taken with them". Must be all the dragons flying backwards.
- ▶ Rockstar is picking eight people who use #MaxPayne3 on twitter to have their likeness recreated as multiplayer goons. The catch: you have to send a photo first. Which probably means no fuglies allowed.
- ▶ Naughty Dog Creative Director says he wants to "change the f---ing industry" with *The Last of Us*. Laments the poor standard of storytelling in the industry as a whole.
- ▶ Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City adds Heroes Mode. It's an online competitive multiplayer featuring eight classic *Resident Evil* characters: Leon, S. Kennedy, Jill Valentine, Hunk, Ada Wong, Claire Redfield, Nicholai Ginovaev, Carlos Oliveira and Lone Wolf.
- ▶ Team Ico chief Fumito Ueda has left Sony and is completing work on *The Last Guardian* on a contract basis. Once done, he will pursue personal projects.
- ▶ The *Just Cause* movie is now called *Just Cause: Scorpion Rising*. Hollywood Reporter claims *Just Cause 3* is in development, too.
- ▶ DICE considers the voice over Internet protocol issue currently plaguing the PlayStation 3 version of *Battlefield 3* to be a "top priority".
- ▶ Sony has explained PS Move title *Sorcery*'s re-tooling by saying "There were some things we weren't happy with. What we showed at E3 was largely organised around a dungeon crawl, and we realised we didn't want that."
- ▶ According to global game-delivery company Pando Networks, game downloads have been increasing a some very intense rates around the globe, with a 1025% increase in Europe and a 595% growth in Latin America since 2009.
- ▶ Contributions to Child's Play Charity have reached \$1.95 million this year, following the Child's Play Gala and Auction. The event raised another \$351,000 for the charity that donates toys, games and cash for hospitalised children. The biggest bid on item? \$21,000 for a life-sized *Half-Life* Gravity Gun. Non-functional.
- ▶ Infinity Ward is handing out 5000 day bans for *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3* players. You'll get nearly 14 years of banning for "boosting, cheating, hacking, exploiting, inappropriate behaviour (racial slurs, abusive language, etc). Sucks to be you.
- ▶ Kojima reveals his ideas for *MGS5*, including a "a game featuring The Boss and the Cobra Unit during the invasion of Normandy". He handed these plans over to his team so they could take over and make the game during the summer of 2008. The project never happened because "younger staff members offered resistance to doing it without involvement" from Kojima himself.
- ▶ Sony says that vampiric *inFamous 2* side-story *Festival of Blood* is the fastest-selling digital PS3 launch ever.
- ▶ A new *Doctor Who* tie-in, subtitled *The Eternity Clock*, is heading to PlayStation Vita in early 2012.
- ▶ PS Vita to only support one PSN ID per console.





**“It’s very important to us to reintroduce Agent 47 as the original Assassin and we’re taking careful steps to do so.”**

► **INTERVIEW**

# Feel good hit of the summer

**Tore Blystad**, Game Director, explains *Hitman Absolution*

**We loved the Equilibrium ‘gun kata’ head nod at the end of the VGA trailer and the dual-wielding kills that occurred throughout. Is akimbo pistoleering something you’re focusing in on on this time around?**

**Tore Blystad:** What you see in the cinematic trailer is indeed a new game mechanic titled Point Shooting.

The goal for us was to find a way to simulate the sort of focus and mindset of a professional assassin, to create that the feeling of a split-second decision.

Point Shooting is a well known and broadly taught technique among special forces and military units. It refers basically to a simple idea that you don’t have to look down your sights while firing. You aim instinctively as though you were pointing at your target with your index finger. It’s taught to be used in circumstances when you have no time to iron sight i.e. in moments of ambush or close gun-fights.

In *Hitman Absolution*, Point Shooting is another feature driven by our Instinct system. You can use it for instance to clean out a room of enemies in a fast, effective and spectacular way. But as any mechanic in a *Hitman* game Point Shooting has its place with both advantages and drawbacks, it all depends on the player’s choices.

**Your Glacier2 engine looks bloody amazing. What are its greatest strengths, or some facets of it that you are most proud of?**

**TB:** Thank you! We were very fortunate that our owners allowed us to create a proprietary game engine for *Hitman Absolution*, so everything has been tailor made to fit our requirements. The most significant part of the engine is the AI, which is the heart of any *Hitman* game.

The goal is to create a living, breathing world and our new AI has an Intelligence spectrum allowing them far more nuanced and coordinated behaviour than before.

The music system in *Absolution* is designed in conjunction with the AI and can listen to any state the AI is in and blend accordingly. The composers can score any play style uniquely and transition dramatically based on the player’s choices.

The level editor is real time so the level designers can play the game as they design and modify it, so we can make far more iterations on the design than ever before. Since the game has so many possibilities the levels needs exhaustive testing in any play style and being able to modify patrol patterns etc. on the fly is essential for the quality.

The render is designed to bring the art direction of the project to life and especially lighting and post effects are important to give the game a unique, dramatic look. The levels span from small, ultra-dense interiors to large outdoor sections so there is a lot of diversity in the tech needed to make everything shine.

**Some long-time fans are concerned with this latest entry consisting of too much ‘Hollywood hokum’ or ‘modern bombastic cool’. What is the focus here; dramatic relationships, or blood money and fulfilling contracts?**

**TB:** So far, publicly we have only scratched the surface of *Hitman: Absolution*. It’s our most ambitious game ever and of course we want to start with a bombastic entrance. Our new and evolved Agent 47 has more to offer than any other *Hitman* game. It’s very important to us to reintroduce Agent 47 as the original Assassin and we’re taking very careful steps to do so. We’re still having so much to show and what has been revealed so far is only the tip of the iceberg.

**What can you tell us about the checkpoint system in the game? Why was it implemented and how are fans reacting to the news of this change?**

**TB:** We wanted to contain areas and make the choices within each area make more sense to the player. It’s also a way for the level designers to be able to focus on a manageable space and design it properly when it comes to mechanics and NPCs. The way we design levels now is fundamentally different from the previous *Hitman* games as we design directly in 3D instead of the classic 2D paper design. The level designer expands the level bit by bit as he needs to add new areas to expand the gameplay.



This gives far better flow and allows us far more control of the experience even when the player has full control of the gameplay.

We were pretty nervous about this change and were dreading the play-testing sessions, but all the feedback we are getting is that it actually promotes exploration and gameplay choice rather than limiting it.

**There seems to be quite a lot of environmental weapons, unique to each location to use. Just how improvisational can we get in this regard?**

**TB:** The most important for us with the improvised weapons, as we call them, is that they are a natural and interesting part of the environment and creates diversity and flavour to the levels. Every area has their own natural selection of improvised weapons that belong in that environment, so the bong is only found in the hippie apartment and the nightstick is in the area with the police officers. We want some of the improvised weapons to be a subtle reward for exploring the levels and they can also unlock special challenges and achievements.

**It’s been half a decade since the last Hitman game. Has this hiatus allowed you to properly deconstruct and analyse the previous titles to distil the essence of the previous games?**

**TB:** We spent a lot of time after *Hitman: Blood Money* looking at the games and the mechanics and icons to really understand our legacy and see where we wanted to spend an effort improving it. Every mechanic got pulled apart and put together again in what we believe is a better and more usable way, focusing on making it intuitive and easy to understand. *Hitman* games have a large and complex feature set as many of the game loops require several player actions (killing a guard, taking his clothes, dragging him to a box and hiding his body for instance) and we have tried to make it a better experience both for the *Hitman* fans and new players to the game. 🎮



# THE MACHINE AGE HAS BEGUN...



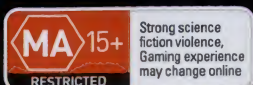
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► INTERVIEW

# Neon Knights

At a recent local event we grabbed Big Huge Games' Lead Designer **Ian Frazier** by sword point and got him to give up the goods on his new RPG *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* to get the low down on its unique look and action packed combat.

**OPS: Do you feel any extra pressure in the wake of *Skyrim*'s release?**

**Ian Frazier:** I wouldn't say we don't care, because we're looking across the board at all the competition. We have a lot of guys in the office who worked on *Oblivion* or *Fallout* and

so on, who are coming from that tradition, so we're not ignoring it by any means, but we are trying to do something different. We have a lot of the same strengths as *Skyrim*, you know the open world exploration and going wherever the hell you want, so that aspect is obviously similar, but in a lot of aspects we're really doing something different. We're not going for a photo realistic art style, we're going for a little more of an evocative vibrant colour palate, I wouldn't say quite cartoony, but certainly less photo realistic.

**OPS: On the subject of the art style, what level of involvement does comic book artist Todd McFarlane have on the project?**

**IF:** His role is not as our director, as we already

**"We want to make you feel like Batman. You've got your whole toolkit of stuff, your utility belt of abilities."**

have an art director Tim Cohen, but Todd comes in and gives us the crazy perspective. He's not a gamer. He doesn't come from a gaming background as the rest of us do, so sometimes he'll say things that are completely insane and unachievable, but that's fine because he pushes us to our limits which is good. He's involved in every aspect of the art from the concepts to the character design to how we're doing clothing, but his biggest influence on the game is all the little details that make up the animation. When you see those pauses, the slow downs in animation that brings that sense of weight to the combat, a lot of that comes from his feedback to help capture that sense of drama.

**OPS: There's a lot of RPGs out there at the moment, with more coming. What, in your view, makes *Kingdoms of Amalur the RPG* to play?**

**IF:** [I think] it does combat better than RPGs have ever done. We're an open world game, we give you the exploration, we give that loot system that's kind of slot machine addictive that you get out of the hack and slash RPGs but you don't normally see in the more hardcore RPGs. And finally, we give you combat that, to be blunt, is more fun than your regular RPGs. I love the genre, but combat's not the strong suit and we finally got to do it right with this game.

**OPS: So you want gamers to experience a completely different style of RPG combat?**

**IF:** We want to make you feel like Batman. You've got your whole toolkit of stuff, your utility belt of abilities and weapons that you can pull out on the fly to keep the game from getting stale. If you want to just button mash your way from end to end you could, we'd rather you choose an assortment of things. We encourage you to do that. 🦇

## OPS VAULT FEBRUARY

2003 ►

We were in love with *GTA: Vice City*, and wanted to spread that love with a guide to the best 25 moments in the game. A lot of them still hold up, like the mission where you have to blow up the building where you have to blow up the building with the R/C chopper, and displaying an ad for an adult film on the side of a skyscraper. We also reviewed *Midnight Club 2* — the second racer after the so-so *Auto Modellista* to be playable online — and loved how much the game had grown compared to the first. Plus, our four-page expose on the Aussie game development scene was encouraging. Not many studios remain, sadly.



2006 ►

What a beauty. This was issue 50 of *OPS2* and although we dedicated a massive chunk of the mag to the Top 50 PS2 Games Ever, (*Smuggler's Run* got the bottom spot [what the hell were we thinking?]) while the *GTA* series as a whole got top-shelf honours) the PS2 reviews didn't stop there. *V8 Supercars 3* had ex-editor Luke frothing ("The level *V8 Supercars 3* needed to reach to edge out the almighty *Gran Turismo 4* is mind-boggling, but Codemasters has done it") and we slapped a deserving 9/10 on *Shadow of the Colossus*. Plus, the PS3 loomed large, with extensive previews within.



2011 ►

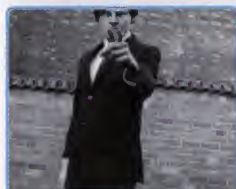
Our instincts have since been proved accurate, as we described *Uncharted 3* as Nathan Drake's "most excellent adventure yet." On the flipside, we also devoted a few pages to the gaming crossover that made sense on paper, but one that the Australian Classification Board decreed we'd never (legally) see: Kratos in *Mortal Kombat*. We also took time out from playing games to talk about the moronic, vehement sentiments unleashed on Metacritic, and attempted to discover a reason why people love to hate. We failed.





## ► IN YOUR FACE

# Should video games be represented at the Oscars?



James Cottey

## YES

The most sensational, inspirational, celebrational, and Muppetational of journoes, James believes the secret to show business is to give the audience what it wants.

**B**iased, corrupt, pompous, dreary, and divisive, the Academy Awards trolls the world with its torpid pace and asinine verdicts. Yet there are oodles of reasons why the games industry should represent at the Oscars. Here are four.

Firstly, for the spectacle. The world of gaming is home to a multitude of eccentric and flamboyant personalities, yet the nature of their work keeps them cloistered away like monks. A showing from our favourite designers would be the perfect antidote to the coma-inducing pageantry of Hollywood's self-appointed aristocracy. It's easy to picture David Jaffe doing burnouts on the red carpet in Sweet Tooth's ice cream truck, or John Carmack touching down in a rocket ship of his own design. The fantastic lies of Peter Molyneux would make his acceptance speeches must-see viewing.

Secondly, for the authenticity. With heads full of Botox, Hollywood actors are incapable of displaying subtle emotions. Game designers feel no

compulsion to disfigure themselves with surgery. The presence of humans at the event would make a pleasant change from the cyborgs we're used to.

Thirdly, to name and shame the guilty. Recall the stir Golden Globes MC Ricky Gervais caused when he called attention to the degenerate and hypocritical lifestyles of the rich and famous. While Oscars hosts are more reserved in their ribbing, the very fact that film snobs like Roger Ebert don't even consider gaming a proper art form guarantees that they'll cram in some ad hominem barbs. However, the games industry should be represented at the Golden Raspberry Awards, too.

Fourthly, and most important of all: To make the movie industry aware of how much it sucks. Our multiplexes are clogged with wretchedly unfunny comedies and vapid action films. Game sales eclipsed box office takings years ago, and the movie makers have yet to figure out why. Maybe they'll cotton on if we rub it in.

**Y**ou are kidding, right? I mean this isn't a serious question now, is it? That's all we need.

Now we're giving every hipster douchebag a soapbox forum to wax lyrical on gaming as a viable art form, as they prattle on about the Oscar worthy dialogue of *Grand Theft Auto IV* or the intense emotionality (not) and confronting gameplay of *Homefront*... and a part of me will slowly die inside. Why bother? Doesn't this industry have enough of the world's eyes on it, scrutinising every move it makes? Why add fuel to the fire and let every media outlet dissect whichever Academy Award nominated entry that puts itself out in the firing line?

Lets say it does go ahead, what are the categories? Best actor not named Serkis? Most phoned in Nolan North performance? Just because *L.A. Noire* and its magnificent MotionScan technology and motion capture actor extraordinaire Mr Serkis brought two real instances of actual "acting" to video games doesn't mean the industry is there just yet. Not even close. What's next, the Heavy Rain Honourary Non-existent Emotion Award? And before you ask, yes, I am going for most rhetorical questions in an opinion piece.

Sure, the future is looking bright with the last year's developments and strides forward and perhaps in the coming years we'll get there, but haven't the few shining examples received enough accolades as it is? Do we actually need another empty award? How about we walk before we run and actually have a bumper crop of titles and actors deserving of such high praise, m'kay?

There's another point to consider: people tune into the Academy Awards to see people they know get up on stage and break out of the character they're receiving an award for. Sorry, but despite the handful of big names in gaming not that many people know who they are. Result? Snore-fest.



Dave Kozicki

## NO

There's no business like show business, and for Dave games have no business in going to this show. He does agree that the VGAs are an utter waste of time and money, though.

Want to get into a great debate with one of us here at *OPS*, or a fellow reader? Well you'd best hop onto [www.facebook.com/OPSAustralia](http://www.facebook.com/OPSAustralia) and make your case there. Argue well enough (and without resorting to name-calling or promises of violence) and you might just see your topics find their way into the magazine!



## ► IN REALITY

## Fungus Zombies

As seen in: *The Last of Us*

Whilst watching the recent trailer for *The Last of Us*, there were two moments in it that caused us to speak involuntarily. The first thing we uttered was "my word, that looks like the sassy chick from Juno whose father is Cave Johnson", and the second: "these rascallions have unique skin problems, even for zombies". Despite having the typical mannerisms of 'fast zombies' Naughty Dog's latest freaks have strange fungal looking growths bursting out of their heads – along with bullets, which burst through their heads just as noticeably.

So what is the *Uncharted* developer suggesting here – that one bad brush with some fungus spores is all it takes to make moderately intelligent animals lose their minds, crack each other's heads open and start feasting on the goo inside? Can such a nefarious ailment exist outside of fiction?

You bet your delicious chess club brain it does.

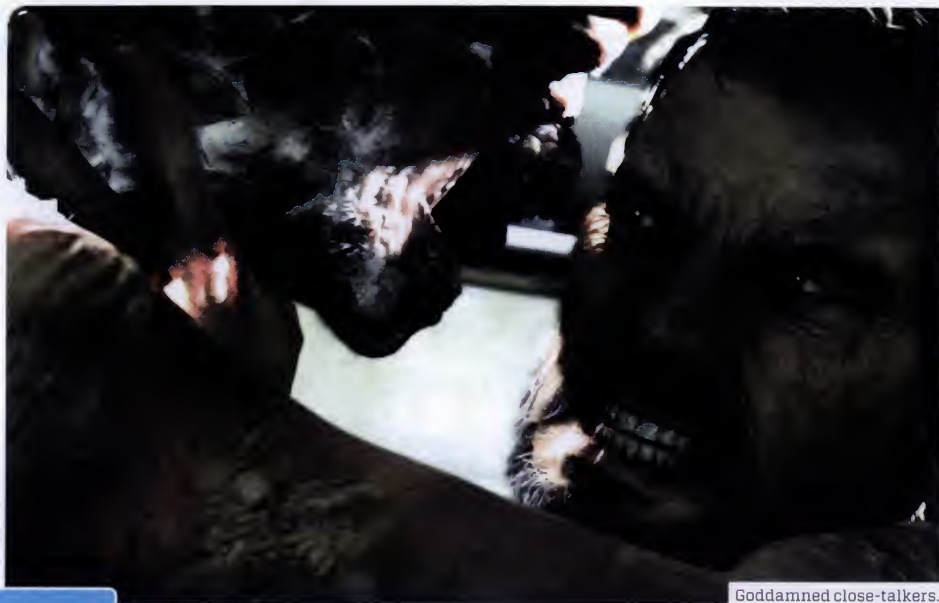
Granted, it can't and doesn't occur in humans (yet), but yes, when it comes to the animal kingdom, it seems that Mother Nature loves watching a good horror movie just as much as the rest of us.

Say hello to Cordyceps, a parasitic fungi which manipulates the behaviour of its host in order to increase its own chances of reproducing.

Let's imagine you're a Carpenter ant. You take a day off from slaving away at the local underground sugar mine because you've got a bit of an itch on your neck. You scratch at it for a

## Worm out of this

Fergus isn't the only zombifying organism out there. Equally remarkable is the nematode hairworm *Spinochordodes tellinii*. The juvenile form of these worms hijack land-living arthropods such as grasshoppers, locusts and beetles, but the adult is a free-living aquatic species which can only reproduce in water. How does the worm solve this geographical problem? Well, once it has grown big enough it forces the host to go commit suicide by jumping into a body of water and drowning itself. A dick move if ever we've heard of one.



Goddamned close-talkers.

bit, shrug four of your shoulders and assume it's nothing. Later, the spores of that fungus itch will enter you through your tracheae and fine filaments will start to grow inside your body. This intruding organism will absorb your soft tissues but avoid damaging your delicious vital organs. It'll need those later.

Soon enough the fungus then hacks into your thinking machine and steers you around like a car. You, good sir or madam, are now this mushroom's bitch. Your new fungus overlord, let's call him Fergus, will now produce chemicals which alter your perceptions of the world and make you do psychotic, self-harming things you'd never normally consider.

At best he will make you spontaneously dance the Charleston, for his own amusement. At worst, Fergus will march your zombified butt up to the highest point of a plant, have you bite that leafy curb and stay there until you die from starvation. The sadistic bastard will then sprout himself through your corpse and use your

cadaver as a base of operations to ejaculate little baby Fergus spores into the air. These cuddly little critters will land and attach themselves to everybody in the colony you've ever loved or cared about – but also the jerk bosses of your old sugar mine. Technically, a pyrrhic victory is still a win.

Scarily, that whole horrible process – from itchy epidermis, to full zombification, to dead body being used as a porno amusement park – takes only 4-10 days. But as we said before, we humans needn't fear Fergus. The Cordyceps genus may have a worldwide distribution and approximately 400 species variants, but none of them can turn a human into a mushroom head with a seriously whacked out view of the world.

If you'd like to experience that you'll just have to wait for some scientist to screw up and create a super-Cordyceps virus. Or you could move to Nimbin and get your head 'shroomed and reality warped that way.

## ► NUMBER CRUNCHING

1.8

number in millions of Square-Enix customers who could be affected in a recent attack on its servers.

15

number in millions of PS3s to be sold by March 2012. Sony says it's well on track.



## Separated at Birth!

NO. 35 FFVII's Barret Wallace and Mr. T



We pity the fool who never saw the resemblance between Barret and... T. Along with the obvious physical similarities, the two correlate professions to some degree. Barret operates outside the law and is the head of an underground resistance movement AVALANCHE. Mr. T is also an extralegal head-smasher who doesn't so much fight against one problem, but many (if no one else can help you and if you can find him... maybe). The two also share an affection for gratuitous bling. In T's case, gold necklaces. In Barret's, machine gun hands.





## ► INFOCUS

# Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance

In a twist nobody saw coming, *Metal Gear Rising* has been revealed to have a new developer attached to it and even sports a new subtitle: 'Revengeance'. Why? Because making up a new word from two words that effectively mean the same thing is fun. Platinum Games is now co-developing the title and it's best known for the psychotic action title, *Bayonetta*. The team is an odd choice, but the more we compare the character designs of

Bayonetta and Raiden (and their shared affinity for fighting in impractical high heels) the more this makes sense.

Interestingly, when Platinum came on board the story was changed to take place several years after *Metal Gear Solid 4* to "give [Platinum] more of an opportunity to show off what they can bring to the series". Can we all learn to love an un-solid *Metal Gear*? Is this going to be a nice slice, or the spin-off that spins out of control? Only time will tell.



# SO YOU WANT TO BE A ... SNIPER

## ► NEWS

### OPTION 1

Despite most *Battlefield 3* player's intense dislike of the Sniper (recon) class, there's something about these solo warriors that captures the fascination of boy soldiers around the world. Sitting for hours and days at a time in their camouflaged positions, known as a hide, the greatest weapon in their arsenal isn't the expensive hand-crafted rifles they wield, which can reach ranges of over two kilometres. No, their secret weapon is patience, barely moving metres in several hours to establish the best firing position possible.

Situated far in advance of friendly lines, a huge part of a sniper's training revolves around hiding, ensuring they're not spotted or counter-sniped. According to Gunnery Sgt Richard Tisdale, an NCO at the Marines Scout Sniper School, "Marksmanship makes up only 10 per cent of being a sniper", with the rest of the time spent training in advanced field-craft. It's not just about being a good shot, though that surely counts as well. The training takes around two years to complete on top of the standard infantry training, but getting accepted into training is a feat in itself. The two week indoctrination course used to select sniper candidates involves a week of severe physical duress, followed by another week of field exercises, and is used to weed out unsuitable candidates. Another part of the training involves attending the Survival Evasion Resistance and Escape course, and according to an anonymous Marine Sniper recently interviewed online, it isn't pleasant, saying "...they torture you through different methods, they starve you, and they lock you in a little cement box. You actually have to sign a waiver at the beginning of the course saying that you won't hold them responsible for any physical damage done to yourself."

Snipers also have to be able to deal with seeing the results of their handiwork in a way that regular soldiers don't, thanks to the incredibly strong optical lenses used on their weapons. Requiring years of strenuous training and a certain cool and calculating mindset to be able to snuff out targeted individuals, being a sniper in the real world is neither for the physically unfit or overly sentimental.

### TIME:

Your best bet as an Aussie is to join the Australian Army at a young age (under 21), and prepare for a couple of years of strenuous training, which you can flunk out of at any stage.

### OPTION 2

Recon class in *Battlefield 3*

### TIME:

Five minutes



## This Generation's Next Top Model?

We get to grips with what could be the last PSP, the E-1000. It's a striking successor, but will the sleek inherit the worth?

It's hard to believe that six years have passed since the PSP launched in Australia. But though we stand upon the precipice of its next evolutionary leap forward, the PS Vita, Sony has decided to give the original design one last hurrah. We for one applaud the move, as the impressive parthenon of the PSP should not have its lineage ended on the PSPGo. The new successor to the mantle is the PSP E-1000, a cut-down budget model that should make dials smile and wallets sigh with its very reasonable \$139 price tag.

We've been stress-testing one for a while now and we're ready to share our thoughts. Now, we don't know about you, but we like our PSPs thick and juicy, easy to hold like the hefty launch unit, the PSP 1000. The E-1000 is of the same school of chunky thought, though it weighs less which ought to sate the hardcore gamer's urge to burn as few calories as possible whilst gaming. The unit is not, however, over-light – it's anything but a mawkish, heroin-chic waif.

But as Sony's engineers put the E-1000 on an achievable diet they also decided to nip and tuck as well. Mercifully, the power switch has been put further away from excitable palms, and now resides on the bottom of the unit near the headphone jack. The memory card slot has been relocated to the top to allow easier access, and the power LED is much easier to spot now that it's up there, too. As for elements that are missing, the screen brightness button is gone (you change this in the XMB) and the WLAN Switch has been given the heave-ho. The latter is thanks to the E-1000 having no wireless capabilities to speak of; a deal breaker for multiplayer aficionados or anybody hoping to browse the web from their toilet.

Another curiosity worth mentioning is the fact that the battery of the unit cannot be replaced. This has obviously been done to thwart hackers, but it's a problem for honest

folk who just want to be able to switch batteries (either on the go, or when the supplied one eventually gives up the ghost). This new variant also removes one speaker from the original design, making this a mono experience. We don't see this as too much of a hassle, because any handheld gamer worth their salt uses headphones and can get their stereo on that way.

To those of you fearing that this will have an inferior, interlaced screen like the PSP-3000, heave a sigh of relief. The E-1000 has a purty progressive screen and it offers some of the crispest and most vibrant colours we've seen

**"The E-1000 has some of the crispest and most vibrant colours we've seen on a handheld device"**

on a handheld device. Keep this screen set to a middling setting and you can expect to milk a good 5-6 hours out of playtime.

Is the PSP E-1000 for you? If you're an existing PSP owner, yeah probably not. There are positives to

this variant that make it technically superior to its brethren, but on the other hand, too many features have been stripped away. That said, if you're gaming on a budget and you never delved into the wonderful world of PSP, this is quite a good deal. Better yet, thanks to the PSP Essentials range (where all the best titles go for 15 bucks a pop), you can build a stash of awesome games quite quickly. All in all, a worthy swan song to a fantastic handheld. Roll on, PS Vita.



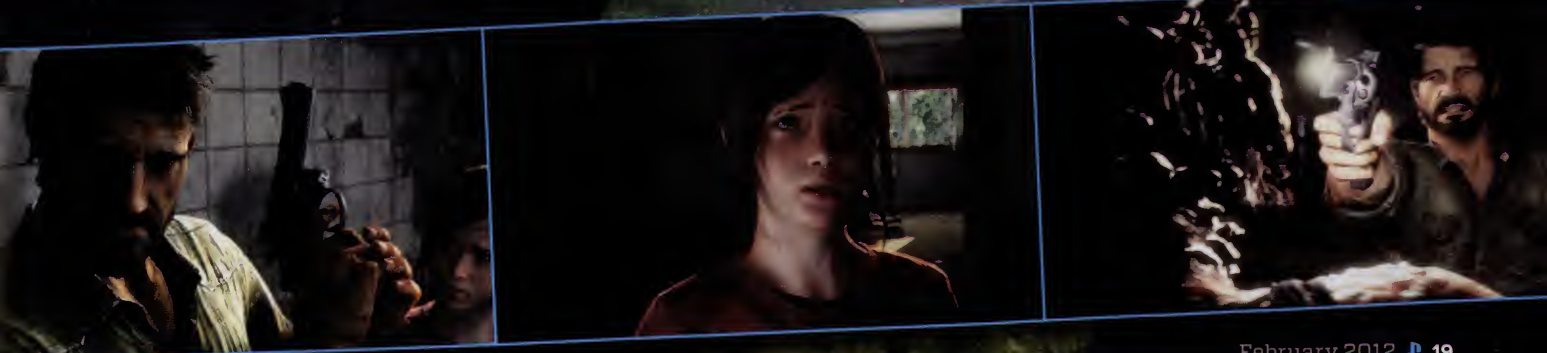


## ► INFOCUS

# The Last of Us

Naughty Dog has surprised everybody by announcing a title not of their lucrative and highly praised *Uncharted* series. *The Last of Us* promises to be a genre-defining experience that blends survival and action elements to tell a character driven story about a population decimated by a modern plague. Abandoned cities are being reclaimed by nature and the remaining survivors are killing each other for food, weapons and whatever they can get their hands on. Joel, a ruthless survivor, and Ellie, a brave teenage girl who is wise beyond her years, must work together to survive their journey across what remains of the United States.

According to Naughty Dog's co-president, Evan Wells, the team is excited to finally unveil *The Last of Us*, a project the team has been working hard on for roughly two years. It's their intent to change the way people experience videogames, and they're confident that *The Last of Us* will take a leap forward in cinematic gaming and storytelling.





## ► TOP TEN

# Sweetest Environmental Effects

The vast majority of the PS3's silicony bits are used to pump out graphics, but it's easy to forget the frills that make our game visuals even more attractive. While environments and animations get all the love, it's often the environmental details that seal the deal, turning an average looker into a sight to behold. We've dug deep to find the best environmental effects on the PS3.



1

## Snow Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

With so many mountainous regions encrusted in snow, this game knows more about the white stuff than Al Pacino in *Scarface*. From the way it slowly gathers on objects over time to the wisps blowing over cliff edges, never has virtual snow had us reaching for our woolly mittens like this. Much like *Skyrim*, this is the sort of game you'll want to play over the Christmas break. So realistic, it'll cool you down.



2

## Sand Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

Landing in the middle of a vast sea of sand, this game's depiction of sand is depressingly dry. With Nathan's feet sinking ever deeper as he wearily slogs on, the desert section in *Uncharted 3* convinced us to cancel any plans for a road trip across the Nullarbor Desert.



3

## Smoke Battlefield 3

Just a few years ago even the smallest puff of smoke would bring a console to its knees, yet *Battlefield 3* wraps the entire environment in the cloudy remnants of exploding tank shells and imploding buildings with nary a shudder. Remove the smoke and the game would look bare and simple.



4

## Fire Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception

It's no surprise that one of the PS3's best looking games takes out a couple of awards for environmental effects. With an entire level based around escaping a burning building, gamers had plenty of time to savour the realistic deteriorating wood and blowback effects.



5

## Vegetation Far Cry 2

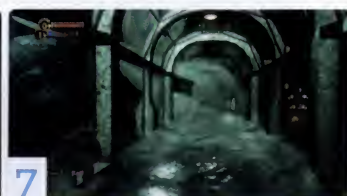
Who can forget the first time they stepped out into *Far Cry 2*'s horizon spanning savannahs, with the wind whipping the reeds back and forth while distant trees dotted the horizon? From the open plains to the river valleys, this was a game that revelled in packing greenery into a screen.



6

## Lava Motorstorm: Pacific Rift

Whether it was slowly slaking its way across the track, or burning immobile and waiting for idiot racers to jump into it, the lava in this game was great. There are few joys in this life more satisfying than shunting a rival into lava, and when it looks as sweet as this – like a bad day in Mordor – all the better.



7

## Water BioShock

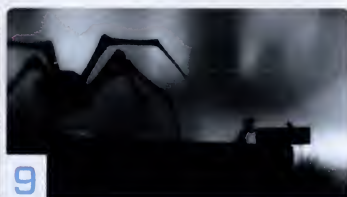
Much ado was made about the H2O simulations done in the original *BioShock*, and for good reason. With the depths of the ocean threatening to bust through a wall at any time – and occasionally doing so – the underwater world of *BioShock* remains a hydrophobic's worst nightmare.



8

## Lighting Dead Space 2

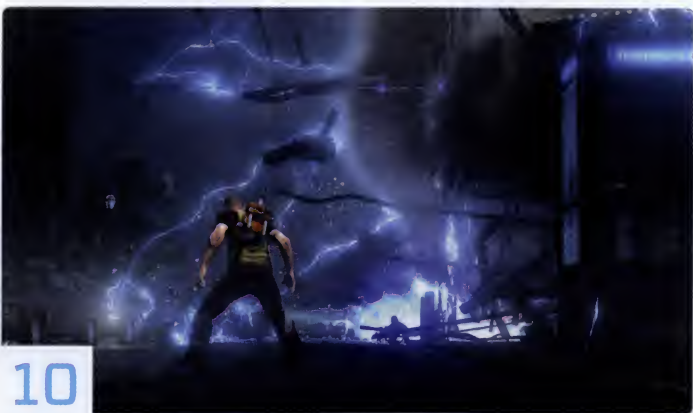
Not many games do this, but *Dead Space 2* had as many people working on its lighting as it did character designers. The effort shows. The lighter team were told to always have the lights moving and fritzing about. They were told to make 'light' a character in the game. Not a friendly one, either.



9

## Shadows Limbo

Considering the entire game is one big shadow puppet show, it's amazing how much is conveyed by the shadows in *Limbo*. The clever use of black on black has this game exuding more atmosphere than a terraforming factory, and we'll never forget the first time we saw a Spider creep out of the gloom.



10

## Electricity Infamous 2

Benjamin Franklin would have been proud to see his discovery put to good use frying perps and skating along power lines in this open world superhero game. The raw untamed voltage flying from Cole's fingertips was so real you could almost smell the ozone seeping from the PS3. We will always remember the first time we lined up some civvies and unleashed an Ionic Vortex.



# SUPER INCONSEQUENTIAL SHOWDOWN



Featuring 42 of the  
crappest and most  
punch-worthy  
characters  
ever!

Taste The Lame





# Around the World in PS3

OPS trawls high and low for what's going on around the globe in gaming



RIIIIIIDGE RACERRRR

## 🇯🇵 TOKYO, JAPAN

PS Vita has gone on sale in Japan and, at the time of writing, the smattering of sales statistics we have coming in are encouraging. It seems 'select stores' sold out of the Wi-Fi model, with estimated sellthrough of that particular version at around 85%. The 3G version is at around 56%. The top selling games are *Everybody's Golf 6*, *Uncharted* and *Dynasty Warriors*, with the DLC-based 30fps *Ridge Racer* selling 'uncharacteristically' slow. Stocks of memory cards got low quick, with the 32GB and 16GB units selling out. We're curious to see how this will compare with our own Aussie launch.



THQ AIN'T FRONTIN'

## 🇰🇵 PYONGYANG, N. KOREA

Kim Jong-il, who has ruled the Communist state of North Korea since 1994, has finally given up the ghost, and the safari suit, and carked it. Interestingly, this means that THQ's 2011 shooter *Homefront* was only two weeks off from nailing his death in their fiction. Likewise, in their version of events (penned by John Milus) Kim Jong-il is succeeded by his third son Kim Jong-un. Scary, no? Makes you wonder what else they got right. Fingers crossed that Jong-il's successor doesn't unify the two Koreas before annexing Japan and South-East Asia. Then invading Hawaii. And then the continental United States. That would suck.



THIS GUN'S FOR HIRE

## 🇨🇦 QUEBEC, CANADA

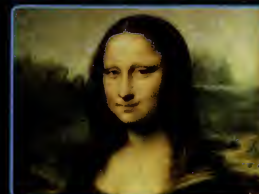
A Quebec appeals court has recently ruled in favour of THQ regarding an attempted injunction by Ubisoft to block them from hiring some of Ubi's former best and brightest. This is especially notable, since the two companies have been at each other's throats since *Assassin's Creed* creator Patrice Desilets made the swap to THQ's stable. Ubisoft claimed that non-compete clauses prevented their rivals from poaching more of Ubisoft talent. The Quebec Court of Appeal in Montreal ruled that such clauses do not prevent anything since THQ's hiring practices weren't "illicit nor disloyal, or unfair competition."



PROFIT ANARCHY IN THE UK?

## 🇬🇧 LONDON, UK

UK video game retailer HMV Group has posted financial results for the first half of the current fiscal year, noting a decline in revenue and notable losses year-over-year. HMV is one of the leading video game, music and video retailers in the UK, with 250 stores across four countries. A statement from the company explained that, while it is confident that it will "have adequate resources to continue in operation for the foreseeable future," the current economic climate "may cast significant doubt on the Group's ability to continue as a going concern in the future." Yikes.



LEONARDO WEPT

## 🇫🇷 PARIS, FRANCE

The Louvre museum in Paris, France, will soon use Augmented Reality equipped consoles as digital guides around its museum, replacing the traditional audio-guides available to visitors. As reported by international news website AFP, visitors will be able to locate themselves in the Louvre via the screens, then listen to recorded commentaries depending on whereabouts they currently are in the museum. Agnes Alfordari, the museum's head of multimedia, noted, "We are the first museum in the world to do this." No word yet on whether the museum consoles will allow the playing of games when the art gets boring. And it will.

## INTERNATIONAL TOP 5 CHARTS

### 🇪🇺 EUROPE



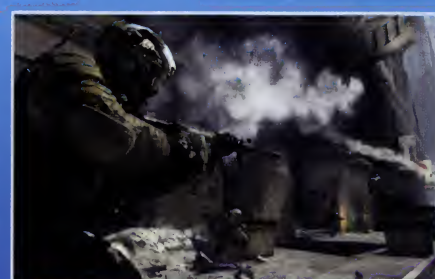
- 1 **Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3**  
Activision
- 2 **FIFA 12** EA
- 3 **Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception**  
Sony
- 4 **The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim**  
Bethesda
- 5 **Assassin's Creed Revelations**  
Ubisoft

### 🇯🇵 JAPAN



- 1 **The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim**  
Bethesda
- 2 **Kidou Senshi Gundam: Extreme VS** Bandai
- 3 **Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Tenkaichi** Namco Bandai
- 4 **Need for Speed: The Run** EA
- 5 **Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3**  
Activision

### 🇺🇸 USA



- 1 **Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3**  
Activision
- 2 **Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception**  
Sony
- 3 **Madden NFL 12** EA
- 4 **NBA 2K12** Take Two
- 5 **Battlefield 3** EA



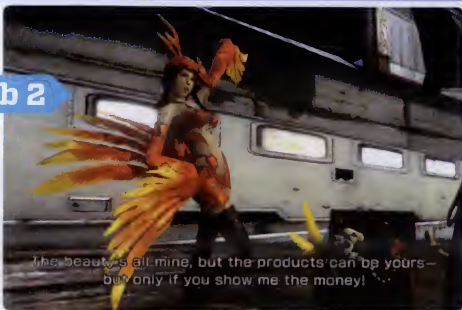
# THIS MONTH

Your 30-day planner of games and the good stuff!

Feb 2

## FFXIII-2

This beloved JRPG series continues to not offer up a final instalment with *FFXIII-2*. Can it correct the sins of the past and stabilise the franchise?



Feb 2

## SoulCalibur V

Transcending history and sensible armour, comes a tale of soul, swords and curious displays of medieval lycra. *SoulCalibur V* could be yours today.



Feb 9

## KINGDOMS OF AMALUR RECKONING

### Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

The game with the name we barely know how to pronounce launches its quest today. Can *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* drag you away from *Skyrim*?



Feb 16

## SSX

It's snow country for cold men today with the return of the *SSX* franchise. Can it hope to carve its own niche in your games collection?



Feb 10

## The Darkness II

The darkness spreads even further today with the cel-shaded, co-op heavy *The Darkness II*. Jump in and get your quad-wield on!



Feb 16

## UFC

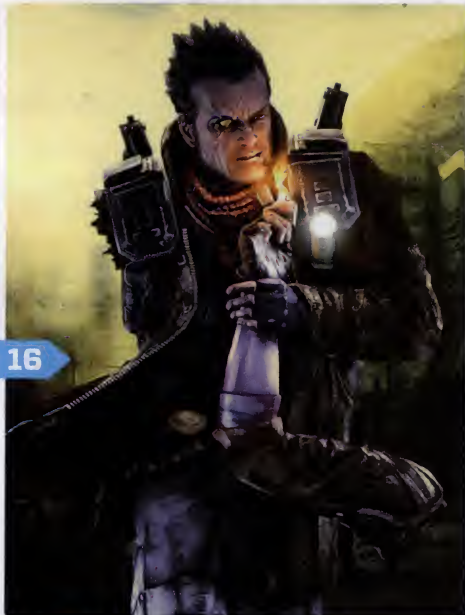
Beefy men get all up in your octagons today in *UFC Undisputed 3*. We'd say "see you online", but the truth is, you won't see us. Until it's too late.



Feb 16

## NeverDead

*NeverDead*, the game where you can just be a head, releases today. The jury is still out as to whether it'll be an experience worth dismembering.



Feb 23

## Syndicate

Reliable producer of cult-hit shooters, Starbreeze, return to hack our collective consciousness with *Syndicate* today for our New Zealand readers. Has *Deus Ex* been cyberpunk'd?



Feb 23

## Contraband

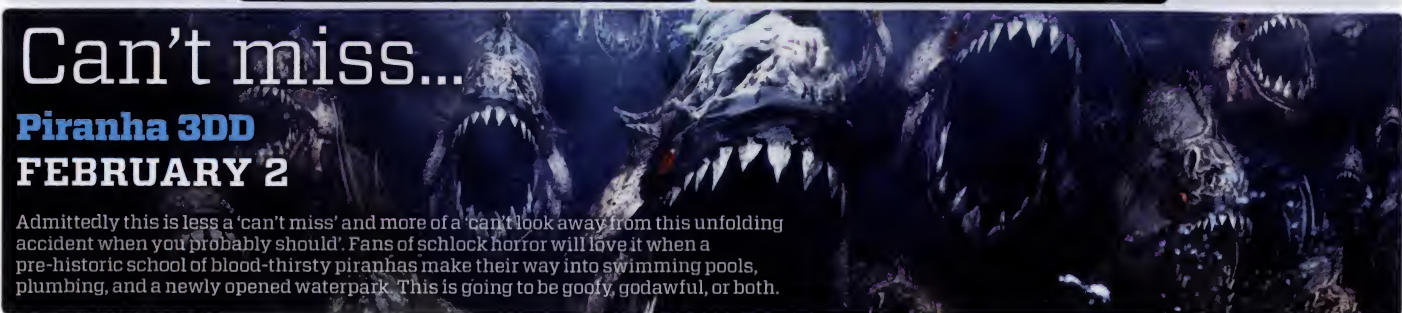
Marky Mark, sans the funky bunch, stars in *Contraband* which opens in cinemas today. Looks fun and proves that gangsters never, ever 'leave the life'.



## Can't miss...

### Piranha 3DD FEBRUARY 2

Admittedly this is less a 'can't miss' and more of a 'can't look away from this unfolding accident when you probably should'. Fans of schlock horror will love it when a pre-historic school of blood-thirsty piranhas make their way into swimming pools, plumbing, and a newly opened waterpark. This is going to be goofy, godawful, or both.





# Release Schedule

Release dates, pre-order deals, new information and much more

## FEBRUARY 2012

**Heavy Fire Afghanistan**  
Genre: Action Distributor: AIE  
Date: February 1

**Outdoors Unlimited**  
Genre: Action Distributor: AIE  
Date: February 1

**Jane's Advanced Strike Fighters**  
Genre: Sim Distributor: QVS  
Date: February 1

**Saint Seiya Sanctuary Battle**  
Genre: Sim Distributor: Namco  
Bandai Partners Date: February 1

**Final Fantasy XIII-2**  
Genre: RPG Distributor: Namco  
Bandai Partners Date: February 2

**The Darkness II**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: 2K  
Games Date: February 10

**Starhawk**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor:  
Sony Date: February 12

**Inversion**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Namco  
Bandai Partners Date: February 9

**Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning**  
Genre: RPG Distributor: EA  
Date: February 10

**Binary Domain**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: SEGA  
Date: February 16

**UFC Undisputed 3**  
Genre: Fighting Distributor: THQ  
Date: February 16



**NeverDead**  
Genre: Action Distributor:  
Mindscape Date: February 16

**SSX**  
Genre: Sports Distributor: EA  
Date: February 16

**Syndicate**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: EA  
Date: February

## MARCH 2012

**Max Payne 3**  
Genre: Action Distributor: Rockstar  
Date: March 1

**Silent Hill Downpour**  
Genre: Action Distributor:  
Mindscape Date: March 1

**Ridge Racer Unbounded**  
Genre: Racing Distributor: Namco  
Bandai Partners Date: March 1

**Naruto Shippuden  
Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations**  
Genre: Fighting Distributor: Namco  
Bandai Partners Date: March 1

**Armored Core V**  
Genre: Action Distributor: Namco  
Bandai Partners Date: March 2012

**Mass Effect 3**  
Genre: RPG Distributor: EA  
Date: March 8

**Rocksmith**  
Genre: Rhythm Distributor: Music  
Date: March 28

**Asura's Wrath**  
Genre: Action Distributor: THQ  
Date: March 28

**Silent Hill HD Collection**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor:  
THQ Date: March 28

**Dragon's Dogma**  
Genre: Action Distributor: THQ  
Date: March 28

**Street Fighter X Tekken**  
Genre: Fighting Distributor: THQ  
Date: March 28

**Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon:  
Future Soldier**  
Genre: Action Distributor: Ubisoft  
Date: March 28

**Catherine**  
Genre: RPG Distributor: QVS Date:  
March 28

**Resident Evil:  
Operation Raccoon City**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: THQ  
Date: March 28

**Generator Rex:  
Agent of Providence**  
Genre: Action Distributor:  
Activision Date: March 28

## APRIL 2012

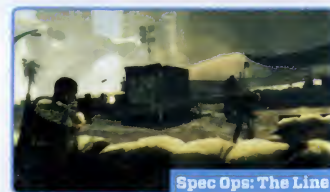
**Prototype 2**  
Genre: Action-Adventure  
Distributor: Activision  
Date: April 2012

## TBC 2012

**Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: AFA  
Date: TBC 2012

**Tomb Raider**  
Genre: Action-Adventure  
Distributor: Ubisoft Date: TBC 2012

**Agent**  
Genre: Action Distributor: Rockstar  
Date: TBC 2012



**Spec Ops: The Line**  
Genre: Action Distributor: 2K  
Date: TBC 2012

**Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance**  
Genre: Action Distributor:  
Mindscape Date: TBC 2012

**The Last Guardian**  
Genre: Adventure Distributor: Sony  
Date: TBC 2012

**Hitman: Absolution**  
Genre: Action Distributor: Namco  
Bandai Partners Date: TBC 2012

**Prey 2**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: TBA  
Date: TBC 2012

**Dust 514**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: TBA  
Date: TBC 2012

**BioShock Infinite**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor:  
2K Date: TBC 2012

**Darksiders 2**  
Genre: Action-Adventure  
Distributor: THQ Date: TBC 2012

**Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time**  
Genre: Platformer Distributor: Sony  
Date: TBC 2012

**Metro: Last Light**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: THQ  
Date: TBC 2012

**Top Gun**  
Genre: Flight Distributor: Tuff Kat  
Entertainment Date: TBC 2012

**Rocksmith**  
Genre: Rhythm Distributor:  
Ubisoft Date: TBC 2012

**Aliens: Colonial Marines**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Sega  
Date: TBC 2012

**Brothers in Arms Furious 4**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Ubisoft  
Date: TBC 2012

**Far Cry 3**  
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Ubisoft  
Date: TBC 2012

**Ninja Gaiden III**  
Genre: Action Distributor: Namco  
Bandai Partners Date: TBC 2012

**DmC**  
Genre: Action Distributor: THQ  
Date: TBC 2012

### ► Limited Edition

## The Darkness II

This may come as a shock, but this is the sequel to the critically acclaimed 2007 release *The Darkness*. Inspired by the popular comic book series produced by Top Cow Productions, Inc. You'll be taken down the brutal and personal path of Jackie Estacado, head of a New York crime family and wielder of an ancient and ruthless force of chaos and destruction known as the Darkness. *The Darkness II* stands out visually with its distinctive graphic noir style, and it is the only first person shooter to feature quad-wielding.

**Limited Edition includes:** Custom artwork illustrated by Marc Silvestri, digital download of *The Darkness Origins* Vol 1 & 2 comics, in game: alternate darkling outfit – "Crazy Abdul" and 2 character ability upgrades.



**EB GAMES**  
\$108  
Estimated  
dispatch date:  
10/02/2012

**JB HIFI**  
\$99  
Estimated  
dispatch date:  
10/02/2012



#### Dishonored

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** Bethesda/TBA **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Borderlands 2

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** 2K **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Counter-Strike: Global Offensive

Genre: Shooter **Distributor:** EA/TBA **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Grand Theft Auto V

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Rockstar **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Twisted Metal

Genre: Racing **Distributor:** Sony **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Anarchy Reigns

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Sega **Date:** TBC 2012



#### South Park: The Game

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** THQ **Date:** TBC 2012

#### The Last of Us

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Sony **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD

Genre: Sport **Distributor:** Activision **Date:** TBC 2012

#### The Amazing Spider-Man

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Activision **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Tekken Tag Tournament 2

Genre: Fighting **Distributor:** Namco **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Transformers: Fall of Cybertron

Genre: Action **Distributor:** Activision **Date:** TBC 2012

#### ► Collector's Edition

## Mass Effect 3

As Commander Shepard, you determine how events will play out, which planets to explore, and whom to form alliances with as you rally a force to eliminate the Reaper threat. How you wage this war is completely up to you: go into combat with guns blazing or use cover to plan a more tactical assault. Utilise your squad to full effect or take a lone wolf approach. Rain death from a distance or go toe to toe with enemies.

#### Collector's Edition includes:

Game, art book, collectable tin, N7 fabric patch, 4x6 lithograph, and more.



**EB GAMES** \$128  
Estimated dispatch date: 08/03/2012

**JB HIFI** \$129  
Estimated dispatch date: 08/03/2012

**GAME** \$129.99  
Estimated dispatch date: 08/03/2012



#### Rainbow 6 Patriots

Genre: Action **Distributor:** THQ **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Ni no Kuni

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** TBA **Date:** TBC 2012

#### Jak and Dexter Trilogy

Genre: RPG **Distributor:** TBA **Date:** TBC 2012



#### ► Crystal Edition

## Final Fantasy XIII-2

With her friends beside her, Lightning defeated the false gods who had ruled for centuries. Now, she cannot be found. When a meteorite strikes, bloodthirsty monsters appear from strange distortions and threaten to destroy a short-lived peace. Amid the chaos, a stranger from the future appears, bearing the knowledge that Lightning is waiting. Embark on a new epic to find Lightning and reshape fate. Featuring new gameplay systems and cutting-edge visuals and audio, explore a range of possibilities where your choices affect not only your environment, but even shape time and space.



#### Crystal Edition includes:

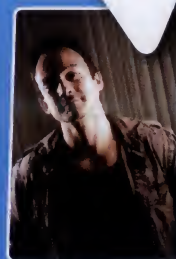
Unique packaging for the *Final Fantasy XIII-2* game, composer-selected soundtrack compilation CD, artwork book, six collectable postcards, high-definition lenticular artprint with an iconic print of Lightning.

#### Pre-order special:

Exclusive steelbook case with 'Fight in Style' DLC, *Final Fantasy XIII* Episode 1 novella, three lithograph art cards with key images from the game.

# In their WORDS

Industry chatter, inside tips and loose lips



"One of the greatest things about digital distribution is what it does to reduce the used game market. I hope digital distribution stabs the used game market in the heart."

Obsidian Chief Creative Officer **Chris Avellone** tells you what he really thinks.

"It is my hope that you catch a glimpse of the future in the footage. In order to achieve that evolution, that future, we at Platinum Games will continue to fight, shedding our own blood, sweat and tears."



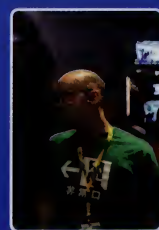
Executive Director of Platinum Games **Atsushi Inaba** tweets about the mixed reactions to *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance*'s trailer.



"Totally glad you've figured out our entire narrative and gameplay mechanics from a two and a half minute cinematic trailer. I was worried it wouldn't be evident. Groan."

Community Statiegist at Naughty Dog **Arne Meyernier** responds to Twitter detectives comparing *The Last of Us* to *Enslaved*.

"This time it's all right there, we know who we are, we know what it's all about, the game's gonna be badass, it's gonna be like dual-wield 87 bazillion guns or whatever, it's a huge, huge experience."



Gearbox Art Director **Jeramy Cooke** on the differences between working on the untested *Borderlands* and its more focused sequel.





# THE CLASSLESS REVOLUTION

Just because I grind a certain way  
doesn't mean you can label me...

The humble RPG has many defining tenets. While the East and West may differ on matters of grind and narrative, they frequently agree on the things that remind you what kind of game you're currently spending 1,000+ hours on: stats, experience points, levelling up, unreasonably huge bosoms barely held in check by sexy chain-mail – and classes.

Classes define your approach to whatever epic RPG jaunt you're about to trade your social life in for. Even though something like *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* was never explicit about their existence, they were still there. At their broken-down simplest, it's a trident of archetypes: Warrior, Mage, or Thief. The pre-dispositions of might, magic, or mischief often cop a creative beating at times to produce Battlemages and Nightblades, but one is always present in fuller force than the rest.

And all this time, it's been really limiting.

While it can be fun to define yourself and assume a concentrated role in a party of varietous misfits, over the years the gameplay resistance afforded by this tradition has become more and more obvious as gameplay itself develops. No other genre can exclude a guy or girl from cool parties more than the humble RPG, which is totally ironic seeing as gigantic dorkolas like me play them and we never get invited to anything.

This year, developers have really been starting to act. "I knew we needed a 'mage' in *Dungeon Siege III*, but I didn't want some 4-HP tool that casts a magic missile and then needs to take a nap," Obsidian senior designer Matt MacLean wrote of the game's bearded wizard, Reinhart Manx. "Reinhart is a very physical guy – you'll see him punching and making sweeping gestures with his magic."

BioWare echoed these sentiments in a practical sense following the release of *Dragon Age II* in

March. One of the most agonising things about the original was the inability to respec in order to effectively pursue the game's various sub-classes as they became available. Being a Blood Mage in particular demanded a massive about-turn on Magic investment in favour of Fortitude, gimping the unwary into oblivion. Realising that players were gumming up the forums with hoarse calls to transmutation arms, BioWare released the *Black Emporium* DLC alongside *Dragon Age II*. Most importantly, it contained the Maker's Sigh potion. Buy this, quaff it, and change everything your class.

Now, Bethesda have taken the genre's collective frustration to the next level with *Skyrim*. It's interesting to note, however, that *Skyrim*'s classless revolution is a gameplay uprising the studio already tried to ignite years earlier with *Daggerfall* for the PC in 1996. The concept of "do something and get better at it" is a sound one, a human one; but it was a little too excited about being here. If you wanted to raise your Jumping skill, you had to literally jump everywhere. This became totally ridiculous very quickly. If memes had been a thing back then, Crazylegs the Ever-Jumping Khajit Idiot whooped a good chance at internet infamy.

*Skyrim* does it right, and does it mercilessly. Given time and pursuit, very little is closed to you. Want to wave a claymore after a lifetime of Conjuration? Practice, and pay no heed to a prohibitive Strength requirement. Why are arbitrary values for Strength and Magic even necessary? A lot of the time they don't even make sense in regards to your character. By the end of *Dragon Age: Origins*, my pissy little Dalish elf was numerically mightier than Sten. But the classless revolution isn't about simplification, it's about truncation. You maths types know what I'm talking about. This is a good thing. Viva la Revolución! 🍷



OPINION  
Toby McCasker

Toby knows you can bump and grind, it's good for your mind. You can twist and shout, let it all hang out. But you won't fool the children of the revolution. No, you won't.



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► OPINION

# THE LAMEST SHOW ON EARTH

If you want to be treated like an adult you need to start by acting like one

I wrote a column around a year ago explaining the reasons I felt *Saints Row 2* was an embarrassment to gamers. The biggest embarrassment around, in fact. Not everyone agreed with me, as is their right, but that was my opinion at the time.

At least one friend of mine expressed incredulity at the fact I intensely disliked its mean-spiritedness, like there was something wrong with me for finding it pretty appalling the very first thing I had to do in the game was kill an innocent doctor (who was female in the preview version I played, but had a sex change before release). I think he was also confused as to why I wasn't cool with why my character was so quick to throw an attractive bartender into a hail of bullets to save himself in a later cutscene.

My opinions are my own, and I don't need to run them by my friends and peers for approval.

The beautiful thing about an opinion, however, is that rational people can change them based on new information. For mine, *Saints Row 2* has been thoroughly usurped as modern gaming's biggest embarrassment.

The new winner is the Spike Video Game Awards. The VGAs.

I don't think many people outside of the US give much more than two fifths of a full shit about the VGAs. I don't think many people inside the US care either, to be honest.

It was around the time when I watched Sledgehammer Games' Michael Condrey, one of the few developers even allowed on stage in the first place, coerced into lying down in front of everybody so that a man dressed as a soldier could pretend to dunk his scrotum into his mouth, that

I came to the realisation that the VGAs are now the games industry's most embarrassing spectacle.

If your speech goes too long at the Oscars they drown you out with music and then politely usher you off stage.

At the VGAs you get teabagged. Teabagged by a trained teabagger hired to wait off to the side of the stage waiting to teabag you.

Do we really want non-gamers thinking we find this funny? Because I think it's pathetic. Along with the rampant racism, sexism

and general abuse this is exactly the kind of stuff that keeps people offline. It certainly keeps me offline. The idea of being insulted by someone I can't immediately punch in the face for geographic reasons doesn't jive with me.

A video game award show could be so much more than a cavalcade of Hollywood C-listers clinging on to what fame they have left by doling out awards at the VGAs. It could actually be about the awards themselves, and the people and teams that earned them. For an awards show

the VGAs dedicates precious little time to people actually winning the awards, focussing instead on exclusive reveals of games a year or more away.

Many categories were awarded via a brief montage or voice-over. You may have already heard via Twitter that Mark Hamill was none-too-impressed with proceedings; he'd been nominated for a voice acting award and was invited to the show, only to find himself wedged up in the nosebleed section and entirely unaware that his award had already been announced before the show even started.

Nice work, jerks.

The games industry is better than Charlie Sheen and teabagging, and it deserves better. 🐔

**"The games industry is better than Charlie Sheen and teabagging, and it deserves better."**



OPINION  
**Angry Sackboy**

Angry Sackboy is an ex-videogame journalist who isn't angry. He's just disappointed.



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# inbox



## ▼ LETTER OF THE MONTH

# WHY SO SERIOUS?

**M**y dear OPS. One of my most memorable gaming moments this year was from *Bulletstorm*, specifically when I was given the chance to stomp on my enemies with a giant, remote-controlled mechanical dinosaur that shoots laser beams out of its eyes.

I told my friends how I was giddy with the excitement of playing such a fun game. "The game is crap", was the reply. "It has no story and the characters are too clichéd". I agree this was a fair point, but to me that didn't matter. I was having fun controlling a robot dinosaur that could shoot laser beams out of its freakin' eyes.

However that comment did stick with me, and made me reflect on the games that have given me the most enjoyment, the ones that stuck with me for being unashamedly fun in spite of their flaws.

*Dead Rising 2* was another favourite that came to mind. This was a game that had the worst save-system imaginable and a protagonist who had all the charm of wet cardboard. But after a hard day of work there was nothing I liked better than to pop in the game and bash in some zombie skulls with a female pleasure device.

Of course I admire games that strive for realism, such as *L.A. Noire*. I loved the depth of the characters in *Mass Effect 2*, and I'm yet to play

a game that rivals the story told in the *Metal Gear Solid* series. But it seems as though a lot of us have forgotten how to just let go and have fun, instead choosing to focus way too much on graphics and story.

Not unlike Captain Planet, there are many elements that combine to make something fantastic. Just because a game isn't the prettiest or most realistic, doesn't mean it can't be a great source of entertainment. **Pappington McDeathslash von Bloodkill**, via email

Paps, we couldn't agree more with your assertion. Dinosaurs are more awesome when they're laser-spewing robots. That's just cold, hard science.

You also said something in there about people not appreciating games unless they're uber-realistic, and we think that's a good point, too.

The trick to being a true connoisseur is experiencing everything your hobby has to offer. How can you know what you think is amazing is *really* amazing unless you've sample what's around it.

That's how food critics know the difference between a fine dining chicken fillet mignon and a reheated McNugget breakfast. For the record: we'd take the latter.

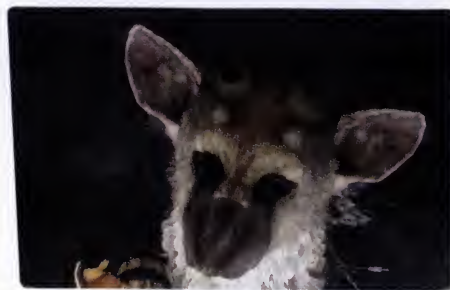
We should all diversify our games once in a while. Branch out, people.



LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS AN:

**EARFORCE PX-21**

Slip this headset on for superb audio and in-game chat!



## GIVETH ME MINE PROPS

Dear OPS,

For this current generation of consoles, the 360 and PS3 have what we know as Achievements and Trophies known respectively. But with the release of the next generation of consoles (rumoured for 2012-2013), what will happen with our Trophies?

Ever since the PS3 has been released, we have been gaming hard, day and night, trying to get that Trophy that seems impossible to get and when we do, it feels great, a feeling of relief. Most of us have succumbed to what is known in the gaming world as a 'Trophy Whore'.

We gamers have been obsessed to an extent, with getting that final Achievement or Trophy for a game, that we feel it is an accomplishment so we post it on Facebook to brag about it. We compare our Achievements and Trophies with our friends and when you know that you have a higher trophy level or Gamerscore than your fellow comrades, you feel like you can just say 'Haha' to them.

What will happen when the next generation of consoles roll in? Will there be a new system for showing of your gaming prowess? Will we be able to transfer our trophy level or Gamerscore. These are the questions that I want to know. I feel that it will be troublesome for most gamers. Most gamers might not want to have to earn their trophy level again because it was so high. If they do have a new system, would we have to start again and work our way up?

I for one, do not want to have to work my way up again. Sure getting the next console will be great obviously, but I have gamed for hours day in and day out trying to get that final trophy in a game and I do not want to have to work my way up again if they strip me off my many platinum trophies.

**Joel Garcia**, via email

First of all, yes, the majority of us here at OPS are confirmed Trophy bandits. Adam assures us he is retired, but if somebody plays a YouTube clip with that sweet 'bling' sound he'll meerkat up in his cubicle and start sniffing the air for Platinum. We're not sure what will happen to our trophies come PS4, but we do know this: if Sony chose to not bring our past glories across in some fashion there'll be rioting in the forums, lobbies and streets of Home. Otherwise, your guess is as good as ours at this point.

## THE LAST TARDY-AN

Hey guys,

As you may be aware, this week the head of Team ICO (Fumito Ueda) has left the company and Sony in order to pursue personal endeavours, leaving many to wonder what the hell is going on with the *The Last Guardian*? I mean sure Ueda's departure from Sony is probably the cause of *The Last Guardian*'s multiple delays, but in all honesty how do we know the project is still being held together, I mean he was Team Ico, without him we wouldn't have classics like *Shadow of the Colossus* or *ICO*. So I just want to know what the hell are developers in Japan such as Team ICO and Polyphony Digital doing? Think about it the time *The Last Guardian* and *Gran Turismo 5* took (or are taking in the

## Speak to us!

Love the mag? Hate the mag? We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games – on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins the Game of the Month! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:

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former's case) which is about 5 years, pretty much the entire *Uncharted* series was released.

It just makes you think maybe our friends in Japan need to take a visit to our friends at Naughty Dog or Sucker Punch and see what they are doing right, because they are able to pump out fantastic games in a 2-year schedule, I mean are Team ICO and Polyphony lacking the resources needed to build these games? I'm sure Sony has plenty of resources to lend them in order to get them moving quicker. But don't get me wrong the games that those studios make are beyond amazing, give or take *Gran Turismo 5* (which basically suffered due to missing out on an entire generation of racing games) but they take FOREVER to come out, like Team ICO have only released 2 games in the last 10 years.

I have to say I am very worried about the state of the *The Last Guardian*, as are many other gamers who want to know what is going on with one of the most important PS3 exclusives.

Thanks for your time guys and your mag is 100% pure awesomeness.  
**Jonathan Spiroff**, via email

Not a month goes by that we don't pester Sony for new info and/or screens for *The Last Guardian*, only to see nothing come back through the pipeline. The more we look at it, the more the Japanese development scene is heading into a state of disrepair. You're spot on about Eastern devs needing to hook up with Western devs; we're seeing more and more of this sort of collaboration (Capcom, Square-Enix, Konami, etc). Though he's finishing it off on contract, here's hoping Fumito Ueda left a lot of his DNA in *The Last Guardian* before he left. Or that Sony flash-cloned him in his sleep. Either, or.

## REMAKE MY DAY

Dear OPS,

Love the mag. I was thinking about a lot of these HD ports of PS2 games that have been coming out lately. I ask myself "what's the point?", it just seems like they are only doing it to make more money than to make their fans happy. I do realise that most people like these, and that's okay but the distributors focus more on making something new than just polishing the old with shiny new graphics?

Some of these ports were just appalling like the *Splinter Cell HD Trilogy*, I couldn't even tell the difference between that and the originals, also no co-op in *Chaos Theory*? The Trophies usually suck

too. Like in the ports of *Resident Evil 4* and *Resident Evil: Code Veronica X*, they didn't even have a platinum trophy and they were things that you had to do anyway.

Speaking of Platinum trophies, I am one trophy away from getting the *Uncharted 3* Platinum trophy... Which is finishing the game on Crushing Difficulty. That's all I have to say on the matter, great job on the mag, I look forward to it every month. Keep up the good work...

**Nick Elliott**, via email

You make a good point about *Splinter Cell HD* being rubbish, same with *Resident Evil 4* and *Code Veronica*. Move support in *Resi 4* would've been ace. Those three are the sort of missed opportunity, money-grubbing wastes of time that make Angry Sackboy set publishers on fire. Screw those 'remakes'. Personally, we really do think that *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection* is the template that all remakes should follow. The trophies are fun and well thought out, the graphics

are noticeably superior to the source material and the multiplayer is intact (*Peace Walker's*, at least). HD remakes have the potential to be amazing time capsules and if we continue to vote with our wallets, their quality will can only rise.

## HOMework

Hi OPS,

Gamers, like any other demographic, have varying degrees of intelligence, some know what they're talking about, others don't. Then there's the hundreds of army generals proudly spouting statements as if that's the only truth there is: 'multiplayer is ruining games', 'we need more choices in games' and 'CoD sucks' all being common themes.

But the fact is, they will never admit to being wrong, ever. Despite the fact that *MW3* was the second best reviewed shooter this year people have held the same opinions, I have yet to read a comment saying 'what? *MW3* was actually a great game? I must have misjudged it, my bad!'

Intelligence is indeed an important skill that we should all possess, but the ability to admit we're wrong is equally important?

**Saed Batshon**, via email

Well said, Saed. That's quite profound. We've never been on a forum and seen somebody type the words "well, I disagree with how you feel about game x, but I respect your opinion" (we're sad to say that we've never tried it ourselves). It's all too easy to offer a knee-jerk reaction without considering the positives. So let's treat it like Tyler Durden *Fight Club* homework. Wade into an online fight, but for the purposes of using the aforementioned phrase. Post results on our Facebook page.

## Cuttings

### ► Didn't ask for this

Okay, backwards flying dragons aren't as fun as they sound.

**Stewart Wheeler**, via Facebook

Yeah, good point. We're looking forward to a *Skyrim* patch that fixes rather than breaking.

### ► Not at all solid

Am I the only one who doesn't like *Metal Gear* games?

**James Sprules**, via Facebook

### Nope. But, the upcoming

*Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* looks like it has more in common with *Bayonetta* than *Metal Gear*.

### ► Dodge this

I dodged 99 arrows, but my knee took one...

**Mitchell Debenham**, via Facebook

Snarf.

### ► Confession

I have owned my PS3 since June 2008 and I have never played or touched *Uncharted* at all.

**William Casson**, via Facebook

Really? That's bit like someone never seeing *Star Wars*. Start at 2, it's incredible.

## Official PlayStation Magazine - Australia on facebook.

### ▼ Storefront

What deliciousness have you bought lately?



Ed Tofkaai  
**Battlefield 3 and Modern Warfare 3**  
"Because I'm an idiot and I fell for the hype!"



Brad Allard  
**Duke Nukem Forever**  
"\$18 brand new. Couldn't resist a bargain like that."



Eric Markey  
**Ice Age 3**  
"Bought this for an easy plat, then sold it for profit."



Jeremy Ashe Szal  
**Dead Space 2**  
"I'm loving every second of it."

### Caption This ►

You put the words to the screen. Simple.

**Brendan Pablo Sharman** is a realist. Maybe we can add this for *Move 2.0*?

"Disclaimer: *Move* does not actually feature your own personal cheer squad."





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The image shows two PlayStation magazine covers side-by-side. The left cover is for the Australian edition, featuring a large image of Batman from 'Arkham City'. It lists 'CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3' as the main feature, with a '39 NEW GAME RELEASE' badge. Other games shown include 'FIFA 12' and 'DEAD ISLAND'. The right cover is for the New Zealand edition, featuring 'UNCHARTED 3' as the main feature with the headline 'Official Verdict! How this treasure hunt will blow your away!'. Other games shown include 'SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD', 'FINAL FANTASY XIII-2', 'SONIC the Hedgehog', and 'MAX PAYNE 3'. Both covers have the PlayStation logo at the top and the text 'Official Magazine Australia' or 'Official Magazine New Zealand'.



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M2010PS



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# Mass Effect 3

It's war on a galactic scale as Commander Shepard finally faces off against the Reaper army

The first thing we did in our hands-on session with *Mass Effect 3*'s single-player component was quit back to the main menu. Before actually playing the game, we wanted to see what the front-end was like, and also to change from Minshep into Femshep. This is because playing *Mass Effect* with Minshep is like watching the Ethan Hawke version of *Hamlet*. The dude(s) simply Can. Not. Act.

So anyway, when you start (or import) a new character, you're invited to define the kind of experience you want to have by selecting from three available settings: RPG, Story, and Action. RPG mode represents the typical *Mass Effect* experience, with manual control over conversations and normal combat difficulty. Story mode is for people who just want to experience the narrative without getting stuck in lengthy firefights, so it makes combat easier while (again) giving the player manual control over conversations. Action mode is exactly what it says: harder enemies, and conversations proceed on auto-pilot.

Speaking of conversations, there is also a slider to independently adjust how much control you want during dialogue: Full (you make all the decisions), Major (small decisions are automated, big ones manual), and Action (all decisions are automated). The fact that this option even exists – that it's possible to play through the entirety of *Mass Effect 3* and not participate in conversations at all – is indicative of BioWare's confidence in the game's revamped combat mechanics. What it says is that *Mass Effect 3* is more than just an action-RPG, but rather an action game AND an RPG, each of which is robust enough to stand independently of the other.

We begin on Earth. In the shadow of impossible skyscrapers that shine under a brilliant sapphire sky, Commander Shepard and Admiral David Anderson walk together and talk in the manner of old friends reunited. Shepard, we discover, has been grounded and stripped of her rank by the Alliance and Citadel Council. Noticing a slight chubbiness to her features, Anderson ribs her gently: "You're out of shape!" We don't know for sure, but we suspect this is the game's perfunctory way of explaining why Shepard has been busted back to Level 1. In *Mass Effect 2*, she died and came back to life. In this one, she gets a little fat.

Anderson tells Shepard what she already knows: the Reapers are coming. There have been signs, ominous coincidences: entire colonies on the outer-rim going dark. Shepard and Anderson have been called into a meeting with Alliance brass, and she's not too happy about it.

"I told them this was going to happen."

Standing in front of those responsible for her exile, she wears an expression equal parts indignation and contempt. If they had listened to her in the first place, all of this could have been avoided. But now...? The only thing Shepard knows for sure is that the Reapers are more than a human problem: every species in the galaxy will need to unite if organic life is to have any chance of surviving the merciless onslaught of the machine gods.



A dramatic, low-key photograph of Commander Shepard from Mass Effect 3. He is shown from the waist up, wearing his iconic N7 armor. The armor is dark and textured, with the 'N7' logo prominently displayed on his left chest. He is holding a large, futuristic assault rifle in his right hand, which is raised towards the top right of the frame. The background is a dark, stormy sky with swirling clouds and a bright light source on the right, creating a high-contrast, cinematic atmosphere. The lighting highlights the contours of his armor and the details of the weapon.

## The Pitch

The ultimate, explosive conclusion to Shepard's trilogy

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** RPG

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**

MARCH 8

**DISTRIBUTOR:** EA

**DEVELOPER:** BIOWARE

**PLAYERS:** 1-4

## PLAYING THE PART

At its core, *Mass Effect 3* is all about Shepard, giving players greater scope to explore the role and play it as they see fit. "We've changed the Paragon/Renegade reputation system so you get freer choice," says Creative Director Preston Watamanuik. "What we're trying to do is reward you for role-playing your Shepard. We want you to make decisions because it's consistent with your character, not because that's how you think the game wants you to play."



## MEETING THE MASS-TER

**Casey Hudson** is widely acknowledged to be the key driving force behind the *Mass Effect* universe. As Executive Producer for the entire franchise, it's his job to oversee the development of everything from games, to books, to social media apps, to feature films. In his own words: "When we do anything in the *Mass Effect* universe, it's under my umbrella."

**So you've almost wrapped up development on *Mass Effect 3*. How do you feel? Relieved? A little bit sad?**

**Casey Hudson:** (laughs) Well, we've still got two months to go, so I don't know if I'm ready to get nostalgic yet. But yeah, you know... I think one of the most unique pleasures that a person can have is to look forward to something then have that satisfied. Like, if you love a band, and they're coming out with their next album, and you're worried that you might not like it – but then you love it. That's something I really want to make sure we do with *Mass Effect 3*. I want to deliver that same sense of satisfaction.

**How do you go about doing that? What goals did you set for yourself going into this project?**

**CH:** Our biggest goal is to close out the storyline of the series with the biggest and best story and the biggest and best ending of the series. But also we wanted to be able to incorporate the feedback we received. For example, we know that people really liked the cinematic experience, the storytelling, and the combat, but they also wanted to see some of the RPG features deepened and enriched from *Mass Effect 2*. So those were all priorities for us.

**Earlier you mentioned "victory through sacrifice" as one of the core values of the franchise – could you expand on what it means for the *Mass Effect* series, and for *Mass Effect 3* in particular?**

**CH:** The whole series is really about victory through sacrifice. There's a progression there: *Mass Effect* was about sacrifice on a personal level and confronted players with the loss of individual characters. In *Mass Effect 2*, we raised the bar on that and made it about a suicide mission where you're trying to rescue your entire crew and your ship – many lives are at stake. *Mass Effect 3* is about the biggest possible scale of conflict and sacrifice. Entire worlds, entire civilisations – that's the scope of what we're talking about. It's full-scale galactic war against the Reapers.

**How is that war represented in the game?**

**CH:** When you're playing the single-player story, it's really all about building up your supplies and getting a lot of people behind you – fleets, armies, and important individuals. These are your War Assets. The better your War Assets, the better you'll do in the galactic war. But it's a choice: you don't have to do any of this, it's just another way for you to experience the higher levels of success.



**With the massive scope of the galactic war, are you worried players might feel a little distanced from it – that it might be a bit impersonal compared to the more intimate focus of the previous games?**

**CH:** Not really. We have a simple system that more or less scoreboards the progress of the conflict – the War Assets system I mentioned before – but the way you actually experience galactic war in the game is through a sophisticated set of story choices that takes characters who are intimately personal to your character, and those relationships, and maps them against the larger political landscape in the galaxy. The decisions you make are big, but they have very personal consequences.

**So you anchor the big picture with Shepard's interpersonal relationships?**

**CH:** Exactly. We're allowing players to go deeper into Commander Shepard, to start exploring their own feelings about what's going on around them, and how that relates to the other characters around them.

**You talked before about how *Mass Effect 3* provides a deeper combat experience than its predecessors. Could you expand on that a little?**

**CH:** With *Mass Effect* and *Mass Effect 2*, the combat system wasn't quite where we needed it to be to give players a really great challenge, and also feel really good and fun. Now we're able to do that. The combat has evolved from action-RPG stuff to something we think is competitive with the very best shooters in the world. For example, you're going to be seeing all kinds of different enemies that are Reaper versions of different alien species you've already encountered, and the great thing about these enemies is that we've been able to give really unique behaviours to each: different abilities, different tactics, different reactions to damage – we're really having a lot of fun with what the different enemies can do, and I think players will as well.



"Anyway, I guess what I'm saying is I'd like to see other aliens"



A planet made of brown and explosions? Let the Reapers have it



Almost the perfect self-photo pose: tilt head back, then to the side, and twist

An urgent call. High Douchebag Whoever brings it up on the big monitor on the far wall. Static. A sound like the gates of hell creaking open. A... soldier? Dust-caked and blood-soaked, his frantic requests for backup are almost unintelligible amidst the cacophony. A monstrous obsidian claw breaks through the clouds and red death rains from above. Transmission dropped.

"Oh my god."

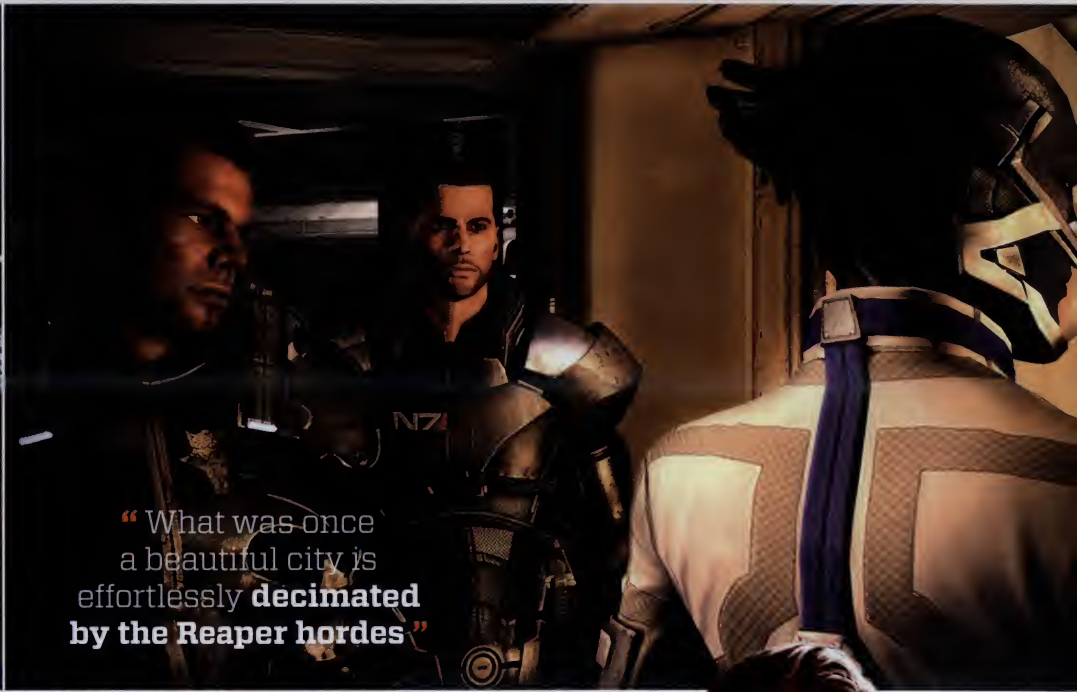
Unlike everyone else in the room, Shepard is not looking at the grim vision on the monitor in front of her – she's looking out the window. She gasps, and before anyone else has a chance to react, the gates of hell creak open once more and a scarlet beam of superheated plasma tears the room asunder. Thrown into a wall and knocked unconscious, Shepard is shaken back into awareness by Anderson a few minutes later and greeted with a scene straight out of her worst nightmares.

What was once a beautiful city has been reduced to smoking ruins – effortlessly decimated by the gargantuan Reaper hordes. The screams of civilians echo in the streets as the severely underprepared military scrambles to mount a pitiful defence. Knowing that to stay put would mean certain death, Anderson and Shepard resolve to secure an escape vehicle of some sort. Thus begins the action.



"My blood! I need that to live"





"Agh! My crotch! I'm not supposed to get bullets in it!"

The first thing you'll notice about controlling the new Shepard is that she's now a lot more agile and smoothly-animated. As well as the ability to climb ladders and jump across short gaps, she can also do a neat little combat roll that allows her to dodge enemy attacks and quickly flank the game's more cumbersome foes. In short, she feels like the highly-trained spec-ops soldier she's supposed to be, and not the awkward robot she was in her previous outings.

In the early stages at least, combat feels more or less identical to the combat in *Mass Effect 2*, but with a few subtle – and important – differences. Thanks to the addition of a charged Omniblade attack and stealth takedown move, melee is now much more effective and tactically viable. Playing as a Vanguard, we discovered that using the awesome Biotic Charge to close distance and following up with a vicious Omniblade attack was an especially effective tactic, particularly against weaker and unshielded enemies. (Not so much against armoured foes, though.)

Guns are meatier this time round: the standard assault rifle you start with makes a satisfyingly punchy rat-a-tat sound that, in combination with the mostly excellent (and sometimes unintentionally hilarious) enemy animation, engenders a real sense of power

and kinetic force. While the new weapon mod upgrade system seems to have potential, the truth is that we haven't seen enough of it yet to make a call. We found mods, and attached them to our guns at the provided workbenches, but the resulting difference in performance was so slight as to be almost undetectable.

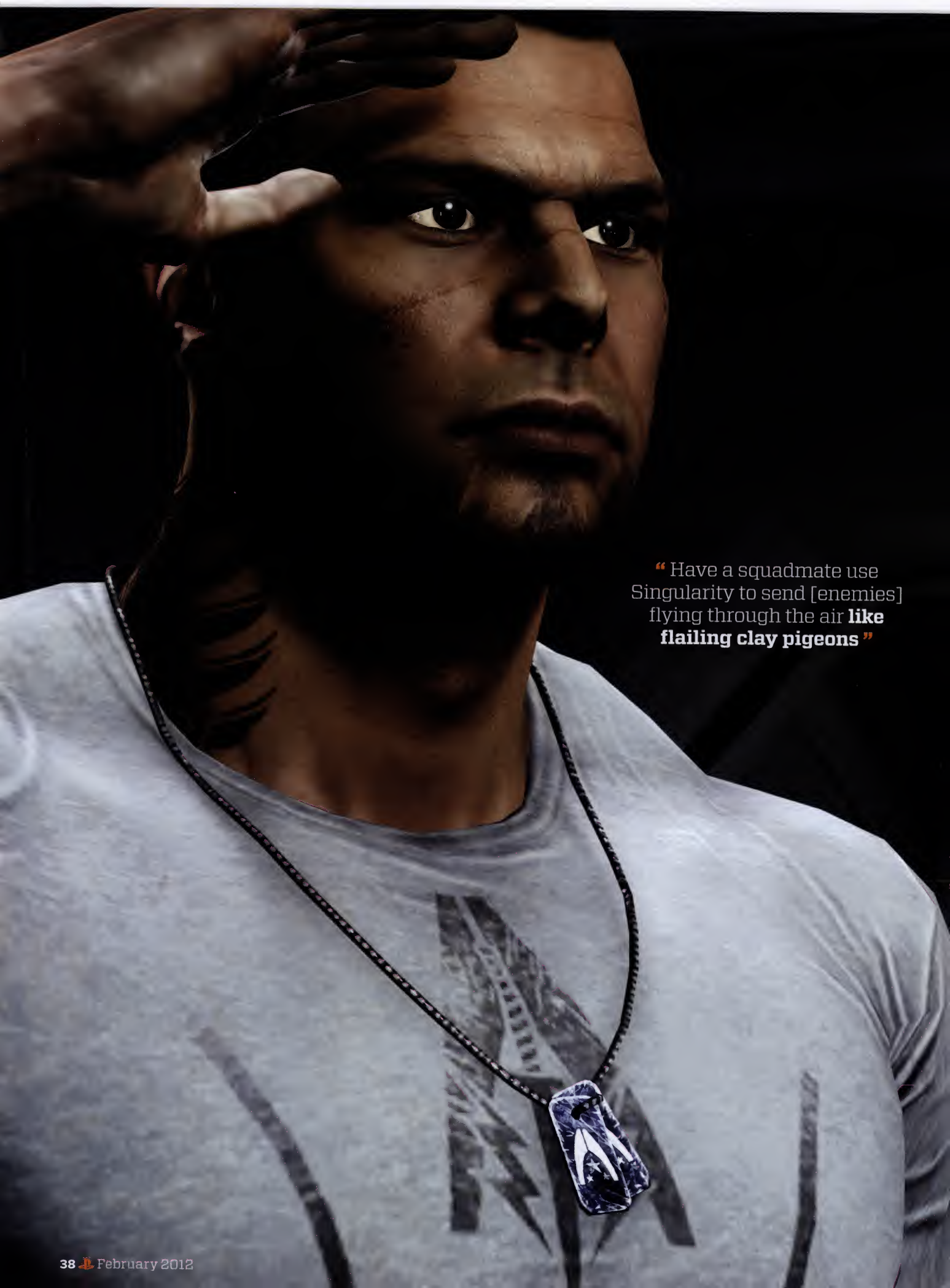
In the opening two levels, enemies are a motley assortment of Reaper husks, Cerberus special ops, and automated turrets. Given that we played the previous *Mass Effects* on Insane, we found it a bit surprising that they presented such a formidable challenge on Normal. Not only do they have more tactical nous, they also come in greater numbers, and in greater variety, often forcing you to adapt your tactics on the fly. ▶

#### REDDER IS BETTER

In July last year Bioware asked fans to choose what kind of FemShep they'd like to see on the *Mass Effect 3* box. To the right is the winner: red haired, emerald eyed, pale skinned – in a nutshell: totally freakin' hot.



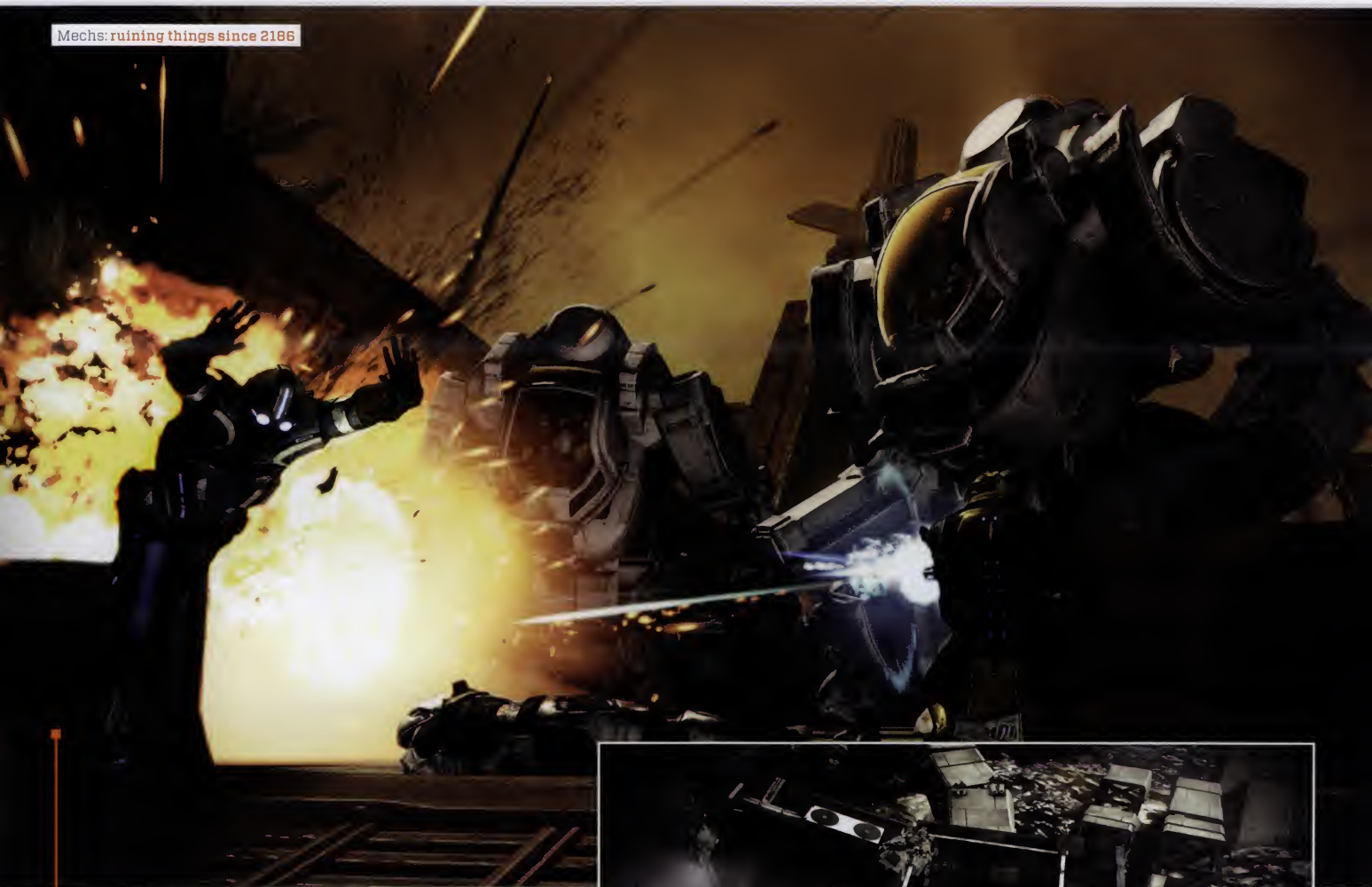




“Have a squadmate use Singularity to send [enemies] flying through the air **like flailing clay pigeons**”



Mechs: ruining things since 2186



## Massively multiplayer

As you play through the single-player game, you'll be tasked with freeing sectors of the galaxy from Reaper occupation. Once secured, newly captured territory is handed over to the Alliance, whose job it is to defend it from further enemy incursion. This is where the multiplayer component comes in.

Playing as one of six races and six classes in a team of up to four characters, players earn experience and credits for kills, assists, and completing mission objectives. The former can be spent upgrading your character's abilities, the latter on better equipment and weapons.

While it makes for a fun diversion, our (admittedly brief) hands-on experience with *ME3*'s multiplayer left us feeling a little cold. Matches plod along at an expasperating pace, and there is seldom any sense of urgency or danger. Of course, we were playing with low level characters with crappy equipment, so things might improve later on. But for now, we remain unconvinced.



**Tsk.** They'll never kill him attacking from the front



Why walk **when you can slide?**

For example, among the Cerberus legions, you'll often encounter Defenders, which are basically heavily-armoured guys with big shields. As you'll quickly discover, attacking these guys from the front is totally out of the question, even if you get right up in their face with a Biotic Charge/shotgun combo. Perform a well-timed combat roll, however, and you can outflank them and attack from behind. Or if that's not your cup of tea, you can have one of your squadmates (not telling who) use a Singularity to send them flying through the air like flailing clay pigeons.

Pull! BOOM! Problem solved.

While the code we played was undeniably sketchy in places (during one particularly disturbing cut-scene, our Femshep spoke with her male counterpart's voice), it's obvious – and we mean totally, undeniably obvious – that *ME3* is shaping up to be an incredible piece of work. It's predictably beautiful and meticulously tuned to give players exactly the kind of experience they want, be it an action-packed shooter or ponderous, emotionally resonant RPG.

It's been a long time coming, and now it's almost here. Shepard's last stand. We don't know how it'll end, but we do know this: it won't be with a whimper, but a big bloody bang.

**Dan Staines**

## They Say

"You are Commander Shepard, a character that you can forge in your own image. You determine how events will play out, which planets to explore, and whom to form alliances with as you rally a force to eliminate the Reaper threat once and for all."

## We Say

We're very curious to see how the Reapers can actually be defeated. Here's hoping Bioware avoids taking the easy route with a lame deus ex machina.

## Verdict

BAD SHAPE  
NEEDS WORK  
GOT POTENTIAL  
LOOKING GOOD  
GREAT STUFF

**SURE-THING**





# Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning

There's no fate but what we make...

**W**e've heard it all countless times before as the marketing machine jumps into full swing. This latest RPG will hit you with the force of an atomic bomb making your head explode as your grey matter coats the wall basking in its pure unadulterated awesomeness. It slices. It dices. It will offer you an experience the likes of which you've never seen before and you will prostrate (not to be confused with prostate) yourself in homage to its glory before happily parting with your cold hard cash to make it your very own (may not be actual marketing rhetoric)...

Bold claims indeed and ones we've heard many times before. With the exception of stellar titles like *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* many RPGs have failed to deliver. That's not to say they are bad games, far from it. But few actually live up to their potential, more often than not offering an expansive open world at the expense of limited combat options. *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* thumbs its nose at such conventions and tells gamers they can have your cake and eat it too. After a couple of hours working our way through *Amalur* we're "reckoning" (bazinga!) they could be on to something.

The story isn't going to win any awards for originality, but then again that's hardly the point in a sword and sorcery RPG. After an evil invading army carves a path through the local populace with its voraciousness and stubborn refusal to stay dead, preferring to reanimate and decimate, the ranks of the good guys are dwindling fast. *Amalur* needs a hero and that's where you come in, though not in the most traditional way.

A bunch of magic savvy gnomes have created a monstrous contraption known as



Okay, good, but you might want to get a bit closer next time

the Well of Souls with the hope of bringing fallen warriors back to life. Up until now they've had zero successes but when you rise up from a mound of decaying corpses you represent a new being, the fateless one. Each creature in *Amalur* has a predesigned fate, but your resurrection puts you in a rather unique position becoming master of your own destiny and the ability to pull and harness the very strings of fate to your advantage, but we'll touch on that a little later.

The most immediate difference you'll notice while playing *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* is the explosion of colour. With so many titles seeking to embrace a more realistic look and immerse themselves in shades of brown, *Reckoning* throws reality out the window and completely embraces vibrant, almost neon tones. Characters jump

off the screen awash with unnatural hues completely befitting a fantasy title. It's such a refreshing change and one we feel gamers will find more than welcome.

The other significant departure is focusing on a third-person perspective with countless attack options. While the animations lack the overall smoothness of titles the likes of *God of War 3*, the wealth of options is extremely impressive. *Reckoning* has more of a hybrid feel sitting somewhere between a traditional RPG in tone and narrative, but resembling a hardcore action title when you take the deep combat into account.

You have a primary and secondary weapon as well as D-pad mapped spells for easy access. Chaining together combinations is easy as pie with the hardest decision which death-dealer to pull out of

## The Pitch

An action RPG with a heavy focus on combat and a vibrant colour palate not at the expense of a sizeable open world

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** ACTION RPG

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**

FEBRUARY 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:** BIG HUGE

GAMES/ 38 STUDIOS

**DEVELOPER:** EA

**PLAYERS:** 1





"Like the sword? I borrowed it from a goofy looking dude with spikey hair."



This attack is called 'The Golden Gaytime', in honour of the delicious ice-cream.

your arsenal first. Those that like their action up close and personal can favour heavy weapons with a double dagger back-up, those that prefer keep enemies at arm's reach can focus on magic and bows or you can mix and match till you find a style that works.

Minutes in and we were giving foes an icy reception with a frost spell, followed up with a devastating longsword strike and after we'd expertly softened them up we'd finish them off with a fiery blast from a mage's staff – and that's just the tip of the iceberg. It's all pretty much yours for the taking at the get go and it's a comforting thought to not have to spend twenty hours mired in an RPG before you get to really cut loose and enjoy yourself. And then there's Reckoning mode.

Each flashy kill earns you an additional charge for your fate meter and when this maxes out you can trigger Reckoning mode. Everything around you slows down, you're more agile and manoeuvrable, you deal and take more damage and – best of all – can earn extra XP by killing foes in the most flamboyant way possible. It's like having the best of both worlds and arguably makes *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* the first RPG to truly offer a deep enough combat experience to faithfully add the moniker "action" to the genre.

It's all about immediate gratification, across the board. After a few hours we'd already dabbled in smithing (and felt incredibly

competent crafting weapons better than anything we'd as yet found in the game), finished a half a dozen quests, unlocked dozens of others and risen several levels. Each raise in rank throws a myriad of fate options at you depending on your play-style rather than any predetermined or chosen character class.

As you rise up, *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* gives you numerous directions to take your character, each offering unique bonuses and rewards. You can stick to straight rogue, warrior or sorcerer classes or any number of hybrids. Maybe a battle-mage is more to your liking or stealthy rogue with a teleporting dodge (or 'blink') ability and a serious longbow fetish.

There are countless options, though we were more than partial to the 'Jack of All Trades'. Mastery at the highest level doesn't unlock the same specific class bonuses of other more traditional paths, but it does give you the high-end weapon bonuses for every killing implement in the game, for those that like to really mix up their attacks.

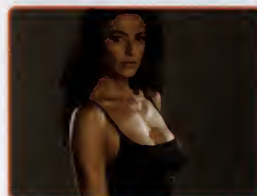
*Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* reeks of sleeper hit. The combat is beyond satisfying, the world is a magical wonderland with colour erupting from every pore and it's offering the same depth and immersion of its biggest competitors. With the developers hinting at several hundred hours of gameplay it's out to prove that Big Huge Games is a hell of a lot more than just a name. **Dave Kozicki**



Give it up for Amalur's favourite disco-dancin' tribute band, the Tree Gees!



How do you kill that which is already dead? Smash it to bits with a big bloody hammer



## Always bet on black

Quickly becoming the female equivalent of Nolan North (in a good way) comes talented Aussie actress Claudia Black. After making sci-fi her bitch playing characters in the TV series *Farscape* and *Stargate* she's more than successfully made the transition over to gaming. Bringing Chloe from *Uncharted 2* and *3* to life, she takes up the mantle of narrator in *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* (with hardly a trace of her accent as opposed to the bogan overtones she is known to use in her other VO work) as well as a diplomat you meet very early on in the main quest, Alyn Shir.

## They Say

"*Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning* brings a new level of visual style and visceral action combat to the RPG genre."

## We Say

Once you break free of the marketing rhetoric *Reckoning* has quite a different experience on offer bringing action back to the forefront of action-RPGs.

## Verdict

BAD SHAPE  
NEEDS WORK  
GOT POTENTIAL  
LOOKING GOOD

**GREAT STUFF**  
SURE-THING



"What's up, Doc?" The murder rate in my clinic

# The Darkness II

Turn the gamma up to play The Lightness II

## The Pitch

Four psychos with their own co-op tale to tell

## Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: SHOOTER

EXPECTED RELEASE:

FEBRUARY 10

DISTRIBUTOR: 2K GAMES

DEVELOPER: DIGITAL

EXTREMES

PLAYERS: 1-4

After being caught unawares by its gore-heavy, whore-filled single-player, you can bet we had our guard up for *The Darkness II*'s multiplayer event. Digital Extremes succeeded in blindsiding us again, both with the game's lack of traditional adversarial modes and because we were served drinks by streetwalkers. Simulated, thankfully.

The decision not to provide adversarial multiplayer is a byproduct of the team being extremely respectful of the comic's canon. Rather than pervert the mythology and give every player a Jackie Estacado clone, Digital Extremes made some brand new reprobates who aren't imbued with the unique Darkness entity. They've got their own karmic crosses to bear. Also, firearms. They bear plenty of those, too.

This dedicated four-player co-op mode is called Vendettas, and we're given four new, fully-realised characters, who collectively share a campaign that's separate to Jackie

Estacado's solo romp. They're quite a colourful bunch, too, and we're not referring to their cel-shaded art design.

Inugami is a Japanese hustler who is permanently bound to a demonic katana which must be fed at least one wicked soul a day or it chops a year off his life. Along with the ability to dual wield it with a gun, he also has Jackie's Swarm power, which lets him belch mini-fly demons to stun his victims. We had equal parts fun and grief while using him. On the one hand, dissecting enemies and impaling them for health was entertaining, but there were times when our melee assaults inexplicably missed their targets.

Next is Shoshanna, a former member of the Israeli Intelligence Agency and wielder of the "Arm of the Night" (read: an evil sawed-off shotgun). As if a possessed shottie wasn't scary enough, Shoshanna can use the Gun Channel power to greatly multiply the damage of it.

Otherwise, you can page Doctor J. P. DuMond, a voodoo doctor who is packing the Midnight Stick, a Black Hole ability that crushes foes down into infinite singular density. It's the ultimate argument winner.

Lastly, there's Jimmy, a violent alcoholic from inner-city Glasgow (which is the most believable backstory of the lot). He is melee-focused thanks to his 'dark axe' and can summon darklings that he calls 'little Jimmys'. He's slow, but very fun to listen to.

Though the action handled a little wonky in spots, we've still got high hopes for Vendettas. These characters are more than a little wacky, but we're assured they have rich backstories that intersect with Jackie's in a meaningful way. Essentially, we're going to get two sordid campaigns and five intriguing characters for the price of one standard game. We punch all those numbers into our calculator and it makes a happy face. **Adam Mathew**

## They Say

"Paul Jenkins really enjoyed writing these characters. Their origin stories are 10 times more rich than what we fed you in the game, and we feed you a lot."

## We Say

If Jenkins, the guy who has written on projects like *TMNT*, *Wolverine* and *The Darkness* comics is excited about this, so are we.

## Verdict

BAD SHAPE

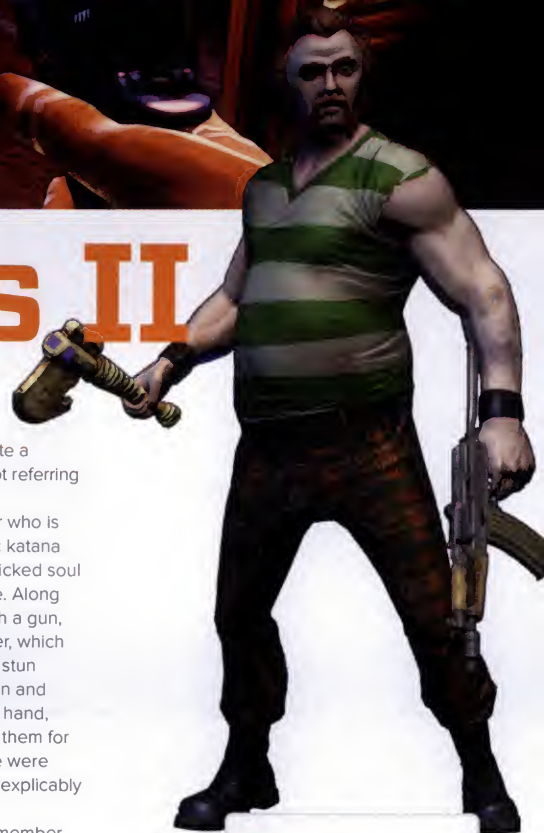
NEEDS WORK

**GOT POTENTIAL**

LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING





Part of the sign is missing after 'caution':  
NIGHTMARISH FREAKS CLOSE BY

# Silent Hill: Downpour

Where things go bump in the night

## The Pitch

A brand new chapter in the once-great series by a brand new developer. Has puzzles.

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**

FEBRUARY 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:** MINDSCAPE

**DEVELOPER:** VATRA STUDIOS

**PLAYERS:** 1

The eighth *Silent Hill* game is the game that needs to re-invigorate the series. The last few sequels have alienated fans and critics, with original ideas (from the critics at least) getting a lot less love in favour of a remake of the aging original. Gamers want something new, but nothing that's doesn't feel familiar.

Japanese studios are increasingly relying on Western developers to provide new ideas to bolster their titles. Enter Vatra Studiosva, a Czech-based group whose only other game to date is *Rush 'N Attack: Ex Patriot*, a downloadable 2.5D side-scrolling action game that's a little bit like *Bionic Commando Rearmed*. This is their first big-budget game, although a lot of their staff is from 2K Czech, who developed the tidy *Mafia II*.

When we think of *Silent Hill* (or, really, how we want it to be) we think of measured progression, slow and steady combat in a one-on-one situation with little space to move and puzzles. We found a bit of that in our small demo where lead Murphy Pendleton, a convicted con on the run in *Silent Hill*, is for whatever reason trapped in the old mines below the nightmarish town. Sadly, we didn't get to see the surface of the so we don't

know how much of it is familiar as we were well underground the whole time.

Being underground meant restrictive darkness, although we started with a simple puzzle where we had to rearrange water troughs to divert power to various elements of the mine. It meant trekking to the spots where the power had been turned on then back to the troughs, and we luckily found a lighter that briefly shimmered in the impenetrable gloom to make our way there. Although Pendleton has deep pockets – even managing to find space for an axe – he can only equip one useful item at a time, but scrolling through an on-the-fly inventory list is a hell of a lot smoother than visiting a dedicated menu.

A ghoul surprised us in one drained body of water, and our on-screen character matched our exclamation with his own yelp of foul-mouthed surprise. He even murmurs to himself upon picking up clues, a classic technique that both reminds players about any important events and links to the past, and builds a touch of rapport with the person you're controlling.

There were a few scares in the gloom, and our lighter threw out pale light in front of us. Pendleton is ready for action, his free hand out in front ready to deal with whatever the hell's coming to grab him. Though the section we saw was tiny it hinted at the claustrophobic nature we like about the *Silent Hill* series.

*Resident Evil* is more of an action game now, and although *Dead Space* is loaded with combat it feels like the new benchmark and direction for survival horror. We get the feeling that *Downpour* wants to tap into what made the first few three *Silent Hill* games special, and bring a real alternative to the survival horror genre. It's doing it with a modern influence without betraying the heritage. Still, if people feel that heritage has been soured, then there's not much harm in taking a risk. **Paul Taylor**

## They Say

"*Silent Hill: Downpour* reveals a new, expansive environment that is similarly claustrophobic and where the player is never truly alone."

## We Say

The grand environments hint at a large world and it's creepier than a house full of clowns.

## Verdict

BAD SHAPE  
NEEDS WORK  
GOT POTENTIAL

**LOOKING GOOD**

GREAT STUFF  
SURE-THING



Holding his lighter at his own rock concert



Skyrim who?



# South Park: The Game

Follow your dreams. Achieve your quest. Beefcake.



## The Pitch

An RPG coming to the PS3, not the Okama Gamesphere

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** RPG

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**

TBA 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:** THQ

**DEVELOPER:** OBSIDIAN

**PLAYERS:** 1

Here's what gives us hope for this game: Obsidian was contacted directly by Matt Stone and Trey Parker. This is something that doesn't ordinarily happen (usually a publisher will approach a developer with a license and ask them to spit out a game to suit it). It's an important difference because there's one less money-grubbing middleman between the people making the game and the creative wackos who wish to fill our TV screens with hilarious filth.

Better still is the fact that, despite the admittedly crappy *South Park* games attributed to their license, Stone and Parker know their games. Parker, for example, has put a hundred hours into *Oblivion*. The challenge, according to Obsidian CEO Feargus Urquhart was not whether these guys had a grasp on games, but whether both sides could come up with a *South Park* game that would look and feel absolutely authentic to the show. This is not going to be a cash-grab cheesier than a box of cheesy poofs.

They've settled on a turn-based RPG that Obsidian says will be both a tribute for *South Park* fans, yet deep enough to keep Obsidian fans sated. Interestingly, we won't be undertaking this faux-fantasy quest as one of the four main characters of the show, rather we get to literally cut and paste together our own kid avatar. Your



Happy hippy hunting

goal, to go from the dipshit new kid in town to a member of Kyle, Stan, Cartman and Kenny's crew.

To earn your place you'll undertake a great deal of free-roaming about South Park and the place looks so authentic you can see the iffy textures of construction paper. Another benefit of the low-rent 2D look of *South Park* means it's easy for Obsidian to generate unique art assets, which in the item-heavy RPG genre, is great news.

Obviously, one of the key ingredients here is comedy and, thanks to the direct script-writing talents of Parker and Stone, Obsidian is confident this game will make you regularly snort milk out of your nose. There's been no word on what this will be rated, but Obsidian says it's committed to delivering the type of adult humour that has swearing, children dying and random talking Christmas poo.

Details are pretty scarce at this point, but it's hard not to be excited about this. Obsidian knows its RPGs. Also, under their own admissions and the fact that they regularly lampoon the hell out of gaming culture, Matt and Trey know their games. All the proper ingredients are in place. **Adam Mathew**

## They Say

"You can be one of the following classes; Wizard, Paladin, Adventurer, Rogue or 'Jew'."

## We Say

Classic Cartman, right there. It'll be interesting to see how much of this makes it through the censors.

## Verdict

BAD SHAPE  
NEEDS WORK  
GOT POTENTIAL  
**LOOKING GOOD**  
GREAT STUFF  
SURE-THING



This fellowship will not end well



Well that's one way to get legless...

Not pictured: a licensed electrician

"Goon: make one more 'losing your head' pun. I dare you."

This is how small you need to be to explore vents

# NeverDead

Limber up

**R**egenerative health. Checkpoints mere seconds apart. The ability to rewind time. All these gameplay devices are there to reduce frustration to a minimum in games, but what about a character that could never die? Enter Bryce, a demon hunter and his mortal compatriot Arcadia.

Instead, Bryce loses limbs. And his head. His whole body can come apart, leaving whatever appendage or body part lying around to attach to his bonce until it finds his torso, then he's right back up blasting away until it happens again. It's a neat gameplay idea that's the central hook in an otherwise pretty standard action game.

Being reduced to bits doesn't just happen when you take a particularly big hit – which happens a lot – as there are a few puzzles where Bryce needs to rip his own head and lob it down a chute, or in our most recent code, into a basketball hoop to nab an XP-boosting collectible. There are plenty of rooms packed with explosives to lure a horde of nasties into, and there's little consequence from letting loose with the pistol to thin out their numbers.

However, there's opportunity to see the 'game over' screen as some knee-high enemies are mad for swallowing Bryce's head. Successfully nail a brief QTE and you'll be vomited back out, but fail and you'll spend eternity being digested. Your sidekick, the take-no-crap Arcadia, can be hurt and injured, so you'll balance your time between watching her back and attacking, resuscitating her when needed. Fortunately she's reasonably handy in a firefight. Parts of the environment can be

destroyed and brought down on the vagrants you'll meet, and surprisingly it only takes half a clip of bullets to loosen up the masonry.

*NeverDead's* key hook, Bryce's dismemberment, works for you and against you. In earlier code we played it was easy to be ripped to pieces and it still is, and we reckon there needs to be some critical tweaks made to weapons, with ranged weapons doing little while Bryce's 'butterfly knife', his enormous sword, easily carves through everything. While you can leap around, picking your body bits back up you can restore everything if your stamina's high enough, and it does regenerate over time. It's comical at first but the frequency of being lopped apart wears thin, especially as enemies swarm.

We've fallen for games that have more style than substance before – we're really thinking of grindhouse-thriller *WET* here – and we really hope *NeverDead* can be just a little bit better, because at the moment it feels pretty average. There's definitely a spark there, in between the constant (at times repetitive) banter between Bryce and Arcadia, as well as amusing one-liners. The XP system unlocks and bolsters attack powers and abilities, but you need a massive amount to start making a dent in the substantial list and that means chopping down hordes of supernatural enemies that are dumb on their own but overwhelming in numbers. Or, you can collect icons littered across the environment that's packed with more explosive canisters per square meter than we've ever seen. **Paul Taylor**

## The Pitch

Standard action-adventure gets a cool twist where you put your body on the line – literally.

## Info

**GENRE:** ACTION

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**  
FEBRUARY 3

**DISTRIBUTOR:** MINDSCAPE

**DEVELOPER:** KONAMI/  
REBELLION SOFTWARE

**PLAYERS:** 1

## They Say

"[There is] a level of humour to the game that brings the world-weary main character to life, while players can revel in game worlds that are fully interactive and eminently destructible."

## We Say

Bryce may be world weary, but he feels clichéd too as he blasts and blasts away. Destruction for destruction's sake is ok, but *NeverDead* needs to be more compelling and more polished to really succeed.

## Verdict

BAD SHAPE

**NEEDS WORK**

GOT POTENTIAL

LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING





Careful with that thing – you'll put an eye out

# Yakuza: Dead Souls

It's the end of the world. Again.

## The Pitch

Japanese crime caper goes gun crazy for the zombie apocalypse

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** ACTION

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**

TBA 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:** SEGA

**DEVELOPER:** SEGA

**PLAYERS:** 1

Although the fan base for *Yakuza* is small, it's dedicated. It's a series that's gotten better with each iteration, making it easier to approach for non-fans whilst still giving the hardcore a weaving narrative. With the inclusion of videogame's latest fad, zombies, *Dead Souls* takes a massive sidestep in tone and gameplay, and gives you the chance to play as a bloke with a machine gun for an arm.

A bit of backstory. Four characters from the *Yakuza* series – Kazuma Kiryu (main lead since the first game on PS2), Goro Majima (guy with an eyepatch), Shun Akiyama (well dressed owner of a hostess club) and Ryuji Goda (gatling gun-armed chap from a gang that opposes Kazuma) are in Kamurocho, the red light district of Tokyo, when it's attacked by zombies. They're the only ones that can repel the undead horde, but Kazuma's also tasked with finding his adopted daughter Haruka Sawamura.

It sounds like a soap opera from hell. Videogames and movies dictate that where there are zombies, there's also gunplay, which is a new addition to the series that has until now only focussed on fists and melee weaponry. The developers have gone all in, giving four of the most notorious men serious firepower, from handguns to combat shotguns, machine guns, rocket launchers, flame throwers and, yes, a gatling gun.

While standard weapons are blessed with infinite firepower, *Dead Souls* also continues the franchise's love of hand-to-hand combat and melee weapons. You'll get your hands on baseball bats, chainsaws, and, like other *Yakuza* games, various objects lying around; bicycles, fire extinguishers, barrels, office furniture – pretty much anything you can grab.

Fans of the series will be familiar with the 'Heat' gauge that fills up after you've pounded on chumps over a period of time. It allows your

character to perform a magnificent finishing move. *Dead Souls* has adapted it and made 'Heat Snipe' that utilises the newly-implemented weaponry, triggering a set piece to ensure maximum carnage and laying waste to multiple enemies. A dormant petrol tanker becomes a bomb in waiting when one well-placed bullet homes in on it. Getting the bullet to its target requires completing a QTE, but time the button presses and you'll be rewarded with a flashy cinematic set piece.

We've sometimes dubbed the *Yakuza* series as being Japan's version of *Grand Theft Auto*, with a mostly open world at your disposal, and a variety of off-beat ventures to take part in, like baseball, pool, fishing, darts, dating, reviewing restaurants and visiting hostess clubs. The latter's been confirmed in *Dead Souls* – even in the middle of a zombie apocalypse – as it promises to be the complete edition, featuring the whole storyline and all the DLC from the Japanese version, as well as a brand new mini-game, Pachislot. But, is there enough room on your PS3 for more undead action? **Paul Taylor**

## They Say

"We know how much people love *Yakuza* in the West and with *Dead Souls* being the latest and greatest in the franchise, it is only right we bring it to them closer to the Japanese release than ever."

## We Say

*Yakuza 4* wasn't going to be localised, so this is a win for existing fans. We're not sure just how many new ones it's going to pick up, though.

## Verdict

BAD SHAPE

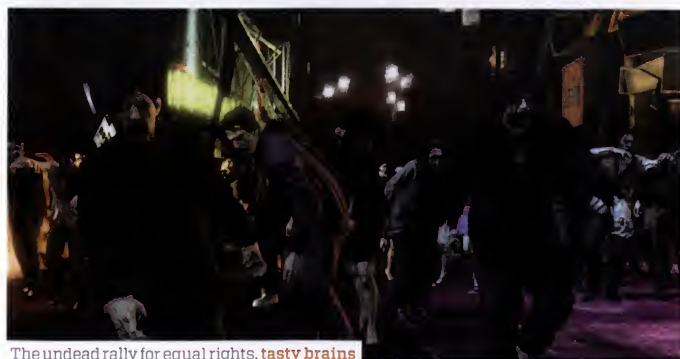
NEEDS WORK

GOT POTENTIAL

**LOOKING GOOD**

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING



The undead rally for equal rights, **tasty brains**



Sydney peak traffic at its most sedate

# DiRT Showdown

A spinoff that'll grip you

## The Pitch

A sideshow to the franchise that replaces rally with destruction derby.

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** RACING

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**  
MAY 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:**

NAMCO BANDAI

**PARTNERS**

**DEVELOPER:**

CODEMASTERS

**PLAYERS:** 1-TBA

**D**IRT 3 was a great racing game, albeit one with a slightly split personality. Codemasters promised more rallying than was featured in (what we thought was the obnoxious and unfaithful) *DiRT 2*, and they did it. But, with the influence of Mr. DC Shoes, X-Games champ Ken Block, Codemasters also bolted the gymkhana mode on the side, a mental and addictive sandbox where, in a closed arena, you had to perform a bunch of stunts and tricks.

The game was easy to grasp, and the gymkhana mode hinted at a side of *DiRT* that could piggyback the title's new tone and improved physics engine. With that in mind *DiRT Showdown* is a sideshow to the series, with a definite focus on action and an intent on ramping up the destruction. Codemasters have declared that the driving model will be more arcade-like to match this.

Gymkhana is just one part of *Showdown*. Joining it is demolition and racing, though the latter is far from a simple 'place first to win'. Expect to be encouraged to destroy your opponents in a race, using various chokepoints, ramps, jumps and objects littered about the course. The arcade favourite, nitro, is also employed here, and various race modes such as elimination (last placed in a lap is, er, eliminated) alongside structured races should make this

tried-and-tested component invigorating.

Demolition capitalises on the pretty damage model that Codemasters have crafted over the years. There'll be destruction derby events, and figure-eight tracks that no sane occupational health and safety worker would approve. Plus, there's also a survival mode where you'll have to last for as long as you can in an arena. It's a safe bet to assume that you'll be tasked with taking down a designated opponent too. On the *OPS* wishlist is a variation from flawed racer *Blur*, where you hunt someone while also being hunted by an unknown opponent.

Score a big hit in-game and, like older brother *DiRT 3*, the replay will be shown from a dramatic angle, allowing you to fiddle around with it and upload it to YouTube for your own collection and for guffaw-filled bragging rights, so that new driving model will prove itself here. Unusually for a *DiRT* game (but logically considering the frame-crushing antics) there'll be a bunch of fictional cars amongst the licensed fare – car manufacturers aren't too fond of their machines being represented in life-threatening crashes.

The titular showdowns are also an event, and are an online feature where you'll have to best your friends' efforts on leaderboards. There's a number of competitive online modes included too, and one of them, 'Trick Shot', sounds like it's going thrust you into a game of oneupmanship. Think *Tony Hawk's* HORSE mode, but with cars instead of skateboards.

We've often felt that *DiRT* suffered from trying to appeal to two crowds: those that wanted a real rally experience and those that just wanted to get sideways, and the game was doing their best to provide that to both but gave rapid-fire moments without much cohesion. *DiRT Showdown* looks to solve that

For every part that *DiRT Showdown* is – fictional cars, destruction derby, fuzzy, imprecise elements in a sub-genre of racing where precision is key – we're intrigued to know what's being planned for *DiRT 4*.

Paul Taylor

## They Say

"[It has] a simpler arcade feel that should make keeping your car on the track and performing outrageous stunts much easier."

## We Say

Sounds like fun, and a dedicated stunt- and destruction-based 'extreme' racer will hopefully purge the series and give way to some actual structured rally in the future.

## Verdict

BAD SHAPE

NEEDS WORK

**GOT POTENTIAL**

LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING



"Crap. Some bastard's parked me in!"



Calling it now: chick second from the right? Secret robot

# Binary Domain

The 'Eh?' Team

## The Pitch

The voice recognition bits from *SOCOM* and a bit of *Army of Two*. And a whole lot of cheese.

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** ACTION

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**

FEBRUARY 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:** SEGA

**DEVELOPER:** SEGA

**PLAYERS:** 1

**B**inary Domain is all about communication. After a revelatory opening cinematic and a level-cum-tutorial that throws you in the deep end, issues of trust run throughout the game. This inhouse SEGA title pits you as American Dan Marshall; smart-mouth, all-guns-blazing ex-special forces type on a covert op in Japan circa 2080. He, his partner Bo and a fistful of other international soldiers you'll rendezvous with are there to find the founder of the Amada Corporation, a company that has been illegally making robots that look, sound and act like humans. More worryingly, these robots – dubbed 'hollow children' – also *think* they're human.

Though it's not spelled out you'll never really know if the rest of your squad are people or not, and the unintentionally cheesy direction of the story makes us suspect that a massive plot twist reveals at least one of your five-person squad to be a scrap head. Whether or not your AI teammates are who they say they are, you need to instil trust in those who are watching your back with smart moves and appropriate conversation.

With a headset on there's a limited vocabulary of commands that you can shout out to your gang – and you're going to have to give it a good yell, as our preview code has a bit of difficulty recognising what we had to say. With the mic off or absent your choices are streamlined to the choices on your face buttons. Battle directives are set to a group of four, but conversations are determined on the fly.

Reply to a teammate's question with the answers they want to hear (generally posed on the quiet walk between action beats), impress them with your leadership or just fill a platoon of bots full of lead and they'll respect you more. Shoot them as they cross your line of fire, ask them to advance in the face of certain suicide or flirt with them and their opinion of you will go down quicker than if you'd just made a joke about dead babies.

This isn't the only what separates *Binary Domain* from being just another cover-based action game. Shooting bots earns credits, and credits can be exchanged for upgraded weapons. Of course, you need to share the love amongst your team, and you can also buy various upgrades that bolster your base health, defensive capabilities, accuracy and so on. Smartly, you can only implement a limited number so you need to figure out just how you want to play.

*Binary Domain* feels solid if a little predictable when you're under fire. ☒ handles dashing to cover, sticking to it and jumping over it, so there are times when you're running towards a low-lying wall and instead of vaulting over it you'll hunker down and then leap over. We're hopeful this is ironed out by release, as everything else feels pretty solid and likeable. **Paul Taylor**

## They Say

"Choose the right squad and the right tools for the job and bring them to bear to reveal the truth at the heart of the robot crisis."

## We Say

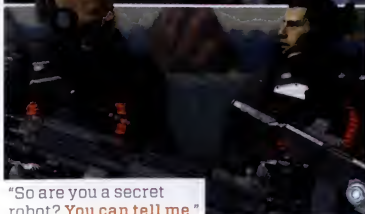
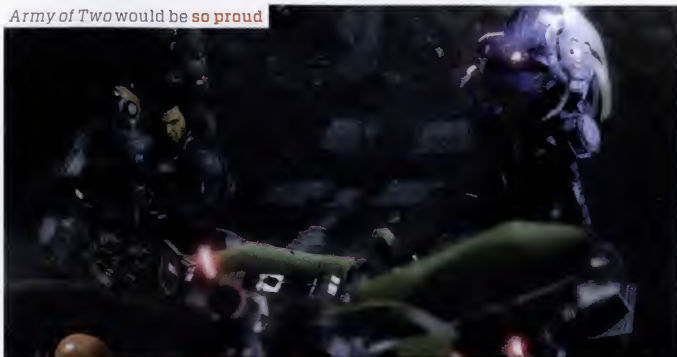
All your team members have their quirks, but like any good leader it's up to you to work around them and use them to your advantage.

## Verdict

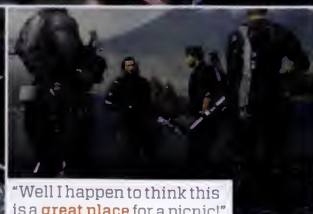
BAD SHAPE  
NEEDS WORK  
GOT POTENTIAL

**LOOKING GOOD**  
GREAT STUFF  
SURE-THING

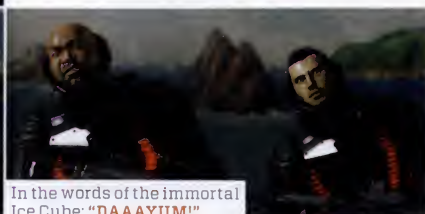
Army of Two would be so proud



"So are you a secret robot? You can tell me."



"Well I happen to think this is a great place for a picnic!"



In the words of the immortal Ice Cube: "DAAAYUM!"



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# GAME

**THE GAMESMEN**

## Harvey Norman

**[JB HI-FI]**

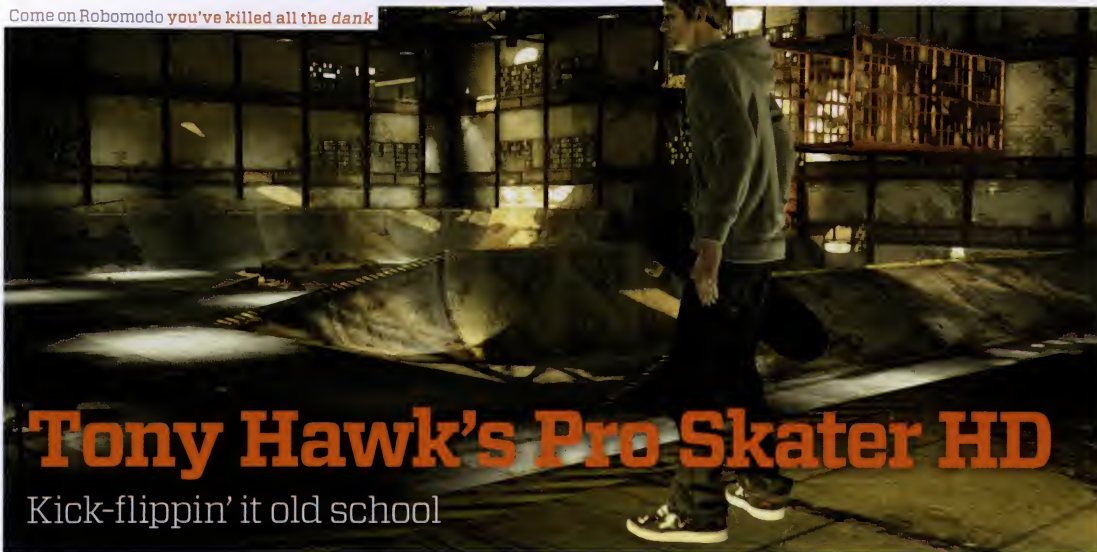


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Come on Robomodo you've killed all the dank



## Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD

Kick-flippin' it old school

### The Pitch

Starting the series from scratch

### Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** SPORTS

**EXPECTED RELEASE:** TBA

**DISTRIBUTOR:** ACTIVISION

**DEVELOPER:** ROBOMODO

**PLAYERS:** 1

**PRICE:** TBA

Before we begin, an old videogame saying: if it ain't broke, don't stop milking it – but if it is, rewind the franchise back to its inception and do a HD remake.

The original *Tony Hawk's* knocked socks off back in the day, and though its visuals have aged like a fine sour cream smoothie, it still holds a special place in our hearts. But we do know what you're thinking, because we're thinking the same thing: why the hell aren't they skipping the middle man and going straight to *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* or 4? They were the pinnacle of the series where the addition of manuals and reverts made combo linking infinite, plus they were before they tried to make the series *Jackass* on wheels.

The good news is developer Robomodo has been given the original level files to ensure every ramp, rail and bench is exactly where we remember it, but they've been authorized to remix

the mechanics. There's no word on reverts yet, but we do know that manuals have been pasted in and the skater roster has been reworked also. Old favourites like Andrew Reynolds, Rodney Mullen and Tony are back, along with new faces like Nyah Huston and Chris Cole. No word on secret characters, but our fingers are crossed for Spidey.

One of the best features of the original PSX game was the sweet stash of licensed music it offered. Unfortunately, license contracts have rolled on with the years and Activision has said this will not feature the original soundtrack. That's good news for new fans who want modern music, but a potential dealbreaker for us fogeys.

It's been two years since Tony slapped us in the face with *Ride*. Hopefully this peace offering from Acti will be of a quality that mends the relationship with franchise fans.

Adam Mathew

### They Say

"We're going back to the core of what made the original *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* games so popular, while leveraging today's console power and online capabilities. We've updated many elements to reflect today's skateboarding scene as well. This is a huge amount of polished content at a very low price."

### We Say

Sounds good Tony. But if it tanks, don't blame the game critics, like you did last time.

### Verdict

BAD SHAPE

NEEDS WORK

GOT POTENTIAL

LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING

# Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch

Good grief



### The Pitch

A beautiful JRPG

### Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** RPG

**EXPECTED RELEASE:**

TBA 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:** NAMCO

**BANDAI PARTNERS**

**DEVELOPER:** LEVEL-5,

STUDIO GHIBLI

**PLAYERS:** 1

Japanophiles jump and rejoice. The folks responsible for *Dark Cloud* and the *White Knight Chronicles* series are teaming up with Hayao Miyazaki's beloved animation company, Studio Ghibli (the talented house behind *Spirited Away* and *Kiki's Delivery Service*). *Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch* is the result of that symbiosis of geniuses and one look is all it takes to become infatuated.

It tells the tale of Oliver, a boy who is coping with the loss of his mother in a fictional city in the US. One day he finds his tears can magically bring a stuffed

animal to life, who then teaches him how to travel to an alternate, parallel reality, the titular *Ni no Kuni*. Oliver then makes the journey across in an effort to find a living version of his mum and, in standard Ghibli procedure, proceeds to meet a cavalcade of crazy characters.

Sounds fun. One person's dangerous dissociative disorder is another's kick-arse flight of fantasy.

The screens here really don't do *Ni no Kuni* justice. In motion this RPG looks like you're playing an anime. The closest comparison we can think of is the recently released *Catherine*, but at a level that is quite a bit more stunning.

Oliver approaches combat by conjuring a variety of magical beasts and dazzling offensive spells. Every battle requires real-time attacking and defense that classic RPG fans will appreciate, and there's a multi-character party system that rewards the shrewd placement of members. There's also a large overworld with towns to visit and dragons to ride (possibly whilst pumping your fist and screaming "yeahhh!" ala *The Neverending Story*).

Honestly, we're pretty damned excited about *Ni no Kuni*. Level-5 certainly know their JRPGs and every time we see footage of its engine replicating Ghibli's animations, even our black, bitter hearts skip a beat. This could be something special. Adam Mathew

### They Say

"The incredible people involved in this game give it a pedigree that is rarely seen in video games. It takes a very hard heart not to be thoroughly enchanted by the amazing universe they have created together."

### We Say

We couldn't agree more. Gamers looking for a bit of whimsy should start tracking this right now.

### Verdict

BAD SHAPE

NEEDS WORK

GOT POTENTIAL

LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING





There were over 140 games released last year, but only one can be the *OPS* Game of the Year as voted for by you. That's not all. Our team of experts pored over every title judging which would be honoured with other illustrious and desirable awards. The winners earn glory. The losers will be forgotten, relegated to the scummy end of a bargain bin. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the *Official PlayStation Magazine - Australia* Awards for 2011.



# The OPS Awards 2011

## My Game of the Year



### UNCHARTED 3: DRAKE'S DECEPTION Luke Reilly - Ex Editor, OPS

I adore the Aussie made *L.A. Noire* and its exceedingly detailed period charm. But I'm still thoroughly infatuated with *Driver: San Francisco*. Nonetheless my mind says *Uncharted 3*. It's such an incredibly crafted, supremely well-paced adventure chock a block with stunning action and the most absorbing ensemble of characters in modern gaming. It's also a technical *tour de force*; the best looking game I've ever played on PS3 or anywhere else. Nice work again, Naughty Dog. Another triumph.

## Biggest Jump in a Dodge Challenger R/T DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO

At their core the *Driver* games have been concerned with cars; from epic chases, to going really, really fast in a lunging American jalopy and performing massive stunts. Plus, the hills of San Francisco that are recreated here are a perfect locale for stashing oxygen between your car's wheels and the bitumen below it. *Driver: San Francisco* encourages – nay, demands – this, and there's ample opportunity to recreate scenes from *Bullitt*, one of the greatest car chase movies of all time.



## The Captain Obvious Award for the Game That Does What It Says On The Tin WORMS: CRAZY GOLF

*Worms*: a 2D strategy game where teams of invertebrates shoot each other with zany weapons on colourful, outlandish landscapes. *Crazy golf*: a game where inebriates punt a small ball with a slightly too small putter through colourful, outlandish landscapes. Mash the two together, make coin.



## The Late-Note Award for tardiest textures BRINK



You know what? We were deceived by *Brink*. We'd had loads and loads of hands-on time with this, loved every preview event we attended and told you as such. Then the final code hits and we spent the first 20 minutes of play time gawping at the empty space where the side of crate – or our hands, or weapons – should be before they painfully stuttered into existence. It happened when we changed weapons, it happened when we turned a corner. It shouldn't have happened at all. Maybe Naughty Dog can hold a masterclass on how to get graphics to the screen without a mandatory install.



### Runners-up RAGE

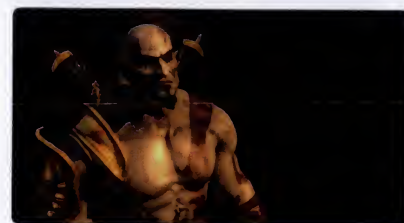
For all the talk developer id rattled off about MegaTextures the game took the best part of a second to load them all in (fine if you're standing still) once you'd finished blasting through an area. Action-packed? Mostly. Buzz-killing? Definitely.

### SNIPER: GHOST WARRIOR

There's more pop-up than a children's story book in this budget shooter. Entire bits of geometry leap onto the screen when they see fit, making a brand-new genre of adaptive cover-based action. Haha, not really.

## Best Remake SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

2011 was, amongst all the shooters, the Year of The Remake. Old games were re-released either on disc or via PSN to an audience that had either forgotten about, or retired the console that played, those old PS2/Dreamcast/N64/whatever titles and tugged at the strings of sentimentality with widescreen support, better textures and framerate. *Shadow of the Colossus* was a system highlight on PS2 but it ran rough. On a Blu-ray, though, it looks utterly superb and it's clever and fresh enough to still appeal to anyone who appreciates unique gameplay ideas. There's honestly been nothing like it since.



### Runners-up GOD OF WAR COLLECTION VOL. II

The first *Collection* re-skinned the PS2 games and made them look a million bucks. *Vol. II* stacks a lot of muscle on the PSP games and by some type of wizardry makes them look amazing on your PS3.

### THE SLY COOPER TRILOGY

We'd forgotten just how much fun *Sly Cooper* is, and *Collection* throws his three PS2 games at you, as well as a bunch of Move mini games. You want value for money? Look here. It's remarkable.

## Best Superhero BATMAN IN BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY

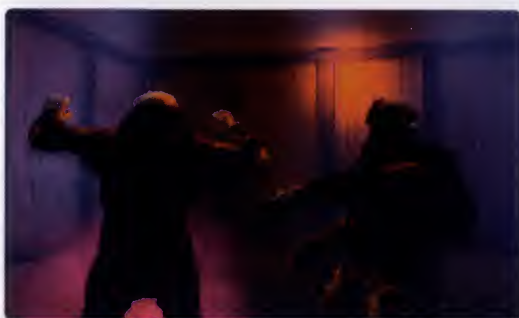
Size up 2011 purely on comic hero billing, not developer quality, and *Batman* was up against some stiff competition. *Green Lantern* could have starred in a game where we could conjure up any weapon our imagination wanted (like a spork-firing mini-gun or *green dildo katana*). *Thor* might have undertaken an adventure that wasn't a cruddy facsimile of *Kratos'* greatest hits. *Spider-Man* may not have teamed up with his future whingy self and bored us to tears across vast expanses of time. *Captain America* was always going to suck. No, thankfully Rocksteady delivered the most complete *Batman* experience ever by handing us new gadgets, classic villains and even a stint as *Bruce Wayne* himself. Roll on, *Arkham County*.





## Best Glitch FIFA 12

Great game. But yeah, for a while there it could offer up the physics of a drunk dare-taker fresh from a stint in a tumble drier. Our favourites: watching players hover or collapse in an desperate orgy of limbs.



## Best Easter Egg CRYSIS 2

Make no mistake, you're in a 'crisis'. You've been charged with the gravest of tasks. Humankind is hanging from a thread, our very way of life is gone and only the most serious mind can bear this responsibility to win through. And then you open an elevator to a disco rave where two enemies are blaring techno and shaking their respective booties. We sprayed our TV with a mouthful of beer.



## Best Trenchcoat DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

Nothing says 'bad-arse augmented security sneak' like a trench coat covered in baroque motifs. You can *actually* buy a real one online.



## Most Unmarketable Name AR TONELICO QOGA: KNELL OF AR CIEL

There are several problems with this name. Firstly, it's a bitch to type. Our auto-correct, if it had the chance, would call this 'Ar tonal Toga: Knell Of Ar Kiel' which isn't much better. Secondly, trying to wrestle this name through your lips is like a cruel pronunciation test, as it takes multiple goes at getting it out in one

smooth run: half of the staff at OPS Towers lose it at the second word. Thirdly, it gives absolutely no indication of what type of game it is; not that it should, ultimately, since it's the third and final game in the *Ar Tonelico* series. To save you mis-typing this into Google, it's a JRPG, and it's ok. Good luck asking for a copy.



## Runners-up NAIL'D

The upside down comma in this reasonably solid ATV racer just sticks out, and it's left us rattling the word around trying to figure it out instead of actually playing the game.

## EL SHADDAI: ASCENSION OF THE METATRON

Everytime we talk about this, we phrase the title as a question with an upturned inflection at the end. And, indeed, what the hell's a Metatron? We still don't know, but we played it and liked it.



## The OPS Memorial Award for the studio that didn't deserve to close BLUE TONGUE ENTERTAINMENT

Blue Tongue Entertainment, based in Melbourne, was a studio that showed the world that top-quality games for PS3 (and other platforms) can be made in Australia. They crafted the very playable *de Blob 2*, the only original IP (apart from the game it proceeded) amongst a number of licensed titles that then-owners THQ charged the studio with since buying it in 2004.

It had another game, a first-person action game, based on *The Avengers* under development, in collaboration with (also shuttered) THQ Studio Australia. Blue Tongue's closure is a sobering thought for graduates who are trying to break into the industry; either be very, very lucky to get a job with a studio here or move overseas and try your luck there.





## Best Space Whale **CHILD OF EDEN**

This had, hands down, the best space whale scenes of 2011. Some people wanted to kill massive *Skyrim* dragons, hipper folk just wanted to de-periwinkle Moby Dick with a vulcan cannon.



## Best Sequel **DIRT 3**

Dare we say this racer was *back on track* after the abominable *DIRT 2*? Gone was the obnoxious 'extreme' overtone, and instead replaced by actual, proper rally cars and snow-littered tracks.



## The Off-Peak Broadband Award for largest DLC **GRAN TURISMO 5**

Sure, the main game came on a disc, but the slew of patches, free content DLC and updates mean a good chunk (a cumulative 1.8GB and counting) lives on the net. How is your internet cap these days?

## My Game of the Year



## UNCHARTED 3 Narayan 'Naz' Pattison - Ex Editor, OPS

It's ridiculously good looking, has the most over-the-top, balls-out, exciting action set-pieces of any game and it lets me relive my *Indiana Jones* childhood dreams I should point out that this accolade is a little provisional; I haven't had time to play *Skyrim* or *MW3*. That's parenthood for you.

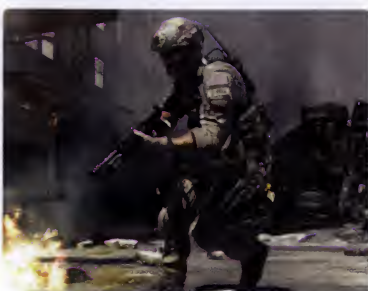
## Best Value **LITTLEBIGPLANET 2**



In terms of content for cash, *LittleBigPlanet 2* is utterly unrivalled. Not only did it offer the ludicrously large and frequently phallus-ridden library of the original game, but throughout the year garage developers stuffed the servers full of more and more mini-games. Personally, we treated the game like we do society – we freeloarded and contributed nothing. That said, our own Angry Sackboy spent the whole of this year creating a linked series of levels entitled "Things I Hate Enough to Murder with Mudcrabs and a Burning Stick". Why haven't you seen it online? He's given it a tentative 2035 release date.

## The Johnson P. Harding award for most dick jokes **SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED**

Excuse our terminology, but *Shadows of the Damned* had more male junk jokes than you could shake a shlong at. Let's review the evidence: your main gun is a 'hard boner'. You were named Hotspur and your demon stick was called Johnson. Whenever you walked through a dark area your comrade would get flaccid. To bring light to said area you inserted him into a pyre and vigorously pumped him back and forth until fire ejaculated into existence. Subtle it was not. *Shadows of the Damned* had its moments, but the constant wang one-liners sure made it hard to swallow at times.

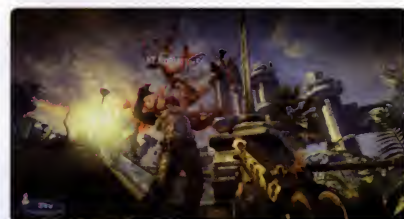


## Runners-up **THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM**

Wow. So much stuff to do, so little spare time and brownie points accrued with significant others to allow it. This was saturated with quests, but also stuffed with opportunities for emergent fun. Get it now.

## METAL GEAR SOLID HD COLLECTION

Featuring three of the best games ever seen on a PlayStation, plus two we didn't give a rats about on the MSX because we never had one, *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection* was a bonafide bargain. This is your heritage, people. Go reclaim it.



## Runners-up **BULLETSTORM**

Things got positively Shakespearean on the cannibal planet when a female survivor turned and voiced her intention to "kill our dick" should we tarry too long. When we didn't acquiesce to her request she pronounced us 'dick tits'. Charming.

## NO MORE HEROES: HEROES' PARADISE

Lightsabers are cool. Rip-off lightsabers renamed to Beam Katanas are slightly less cool, but are infinitely more amusing as they must be recharged by making masturbatory motions with the Move controller (with classy on-screen antics).

## The Cash Cow Award for biggest money spinner **MODERN WARFARE 3**

*Call of Duty* consistently smashes its own records (and general entertainment records) for most sales in five days of launch. The latest sold US\$775 million worth of units worldwide, and the new (non-essential) service *Call of Duty Elite* has racked up 1 million paying customers. At US\$49.99 a pop, that's over US\$820 million worth of CoD.





## Best PSN game **PAC-MAN CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION DX**

Championship Edition DX took the Pac-Man formula – iterations on your performance to get a better high score, learnable ghost patterns and behaviours, the play-area on one screen – and then bolstered it with cheeky motifs, eyeball-searing neon and an electro

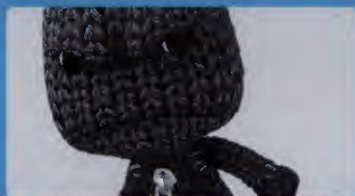
soundtrack to intently nod your head to. Yet it kept the core mechanics that your granddad could understand, applying them across a generous handful of maps that just kept giving you more and more modes to tool around with. Endlessly entertaining.

## The Why'd You Even Bother Award for the most pointless DLC **DUKE NUKEM FOREVER**

We love Parody Map Packs where developers lampoon the competition. Such a potentially hilarious idea is wasted in *Duke Nukem Forever's* 'Hail to the Icons' DLC. Ugly, un-fun and nobody plays DNF online anymore.

The DLC pack features four maps, each of which pokes fun at other popular shooters. For example, the "Call of Duke" map is a clear play on *Modern Warfare*, but – like everything else DNF – isn't very funny. Utterly pointless.

## My Game of the Year



## **PORTAL 2** Angry Sackboy - OPS Aggressor

It was shorter than me, but when it was going my dark button eyes were sewed to the freakin' screen until the credits. They tell me the co-op was good too. Wouldn't know. I don't co-operate.



## Best Zombies **DEAD ISLAND**

Though zombies are an over-used motif, Techland's nasties are in-your-face brutal, stunningly rendered and nicely animated. We really like how they can be strategically bludgeoned, and those undead skulls do squish like overripe watermelons. Blergh.



## Biggest Argument Causer **EARTH DEFENSE FORCE**

**Paul:** In single player, this game is ugly, boring and shoddy.

**Dan:** Oh gimme a break. In split-screen, on a couch next to a mate, it's radballs.

**Paul:** No, it's the dumbest game ever.

**Dan:** YOU'RE the dumbest game ever.



## Worst Racial Stereotypes **CALL OF JUAREZ: THE CARTEL**

Everybody who isn't white in this is either a mo' fo'in gangbanger, or a 'Mexican' be anything but a dealer'. The overwhelming majority of characters who are white? Deadbeat, hillbilly, trailer trash Cletuses. So sad.



## The funniest game **PORTAL 2**

The original *Portal* had a hint of comedy thanks to the homicidal black humor of GLaDOS. *Portal 2* increased those yucks by fleshing her out as an antagonist (both in backstory and by giving her a potato body), plus they introduced the frequently hilarious Cave Johnson, moronic Wheatley and a host of corrupted gadgets. We hope they do *Portal 3*. In space. We love space. Space.

## Runners-up **SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD**

Where *Portal 2* is cleverly engineered to be amusing, this is a laugh-riot because... well, you're engaged in a riot that's laugh-worthy. Spontaneity, nudity and an Awesome Button made for instant hilarity.

## **DUKE NUKEM FOREVER**

Duke's shameless, foul-mouthed machismo took us back to a time when political correctness was all but a fledgling idea for eunuch sissies. It's quite a shame then that his rapier wit and his merciless lampooning of the competition was overshadowed by how shitty and sad-looking his game was. We ended up laughing at you, Duke.



## Sailor at Port Award for most swearing in a game **HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKILL**

Man alive! We consider ourselves pretty liberal with our f-bombs, but this title drops them in world record quantities. 189 in total, which is a bit over one a minute.



## My Game of the Year



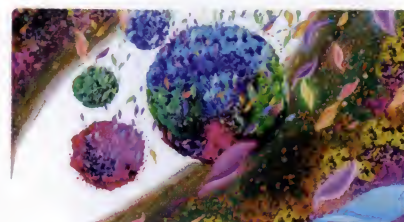
### PORTAL 2 Mark Serrels - Ex Editor, OPS

*Skyrim* had me entranced like a medieval hypnotoad, *Uncharted 3* drew man drops from my dry-as-a-badger's-arse tear ducts, but *Portal 2* made this dumb-as-dogshit headbutt machine feel like a smart-arse Valve somehow managed to imbue *Portal 2* with the kind of old school design most have abandoned – it has proper mechanics and innovates constantly within that space. Where its predecessor was sparse and minimalist, the sequel is cluttered and monstrous, but still retains that seamless sense of place. *Portal 2* is a beautiful thing, and the PS3 SKU was arguably the definitive version.

## The Bloodshot Award for most eyeball- straining game **ULTIMATE MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 3**



Capcom may have gently nerfed some characters, but they didn't hold back on the neon, vibrant primary colours and eye-watering animation. Hit someone with light or medium attack and a comic-book kapow bubble splashes on the screen. String a combo together and a minor eruption of colour flings your opponent up, down and across the screen. Get your super meter up to level 3 or higher, slap two shoulder buttons for a three-pronged attack and just hold on as a spasmodic lightshow is injected straight into your cortex.



### Runners-up **CHILD OF EDEN**

Space whales notwithstanding, *Child of Eden* is made to elicit a form of synesthesia, the neurological crossing of the senses to produce a new feeling or effect. Sensations such as "cool jazz" or "warm colour" or "sweet sound". Or "tripping balls".

### **GALAGA LEGIONS DX**

*Legions* tried to teach you how to play while testing you at the same time, with waves and waves of densely packed enemies swarming over predetermined lines that light up the start of the stage. There's little room for error in this bullet-and-enemy-hell scenario where one good hit wipes the screen clean.

## Best Technical Achievement **UNCHARTED 3**

*Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* was a looker. *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* was a visual powerhouse that became a jewel in the PS3 crown. Then *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* achieved the unthinkable by raising that bar higher and dropping our jaws lower. From the dazzling fires in the chateau, to the disintegrating mid-air cargo plane, or that sumptuous sand, and the cruise ship that thrashed on a procedurally generated ocean (yes, it's the ocean rocking that ship, for realises), *Uncharted 3* positively shone. Naughty Dog is always full of new tricks.



### Best New Vehicle **THAT THING FROM SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD**

Usually we aren't swayed by pre-order deals, but Professor Genki's Man-a-pult, which scoops up pedestrians and fires them out of a cannon, was a rock solid investment. Amusing in solo, hilarious in co-op.

## Most Surprising Place You'll Find Nolan North **PORTAL 2 (TURRETS)**

You can't unplug your ears around a videogame without hearing Nolan North in some capacity. He lands all the AAA roles, like Nathan Drake and Desmond Miles, but it also seems like there's no job too small for him. Rumour has it he flies around, hanging off a chopper like Mikey Rooney, sniffing the air for new acting gigs. Whatever the truth may be, he popped up everywhere in 2011 and he's starting to learn how to camouflage himself. He flew under our radar as The Penguin in *Arkham City*, but we really, really didn't pick him as the Space, Fact and Adventure Spheres in *Portal 2*. You win those three rounds, North.

### Runners-up **BATMAN (PENGUIN/ VARIOUS HENCHMEN)**

Hah! We spotted North instantly as 'Beefcake Henchman #6' in *Arkham City*. Then we played through the whole game only to find out much later that he flew under our radar as The Penguin. Sneaky.

### **TRANSFORMERS: DARK OF THE MOON (MAJOR REYNOLDS)**

This Nolan North appearance took us by surprise too; partly because he lent his likeness to a live-action role, but also because we never thought he'd be involved in such a shonky movie tie-in.



### The Movie License that Proved The Rule **THREE WAY TIE: THOR, CAPTAIN AMERICA, GREEN LANTERN**

In 2011 we noticed a pattern forming with comic book movie tie-ins – and that correlation was crapness. *Captain America* was a four-hour exercise on how to plagiarise a good game, *Batman Arkham Asylum*, badly. Mighty Thor became the God of blunder thanks to Sega's sub-par attempt at *God of War*. *Green Lantern* left us green with nasuea thanks to it being linear, repetitive and lacking in ideas. That said, each developer did nail the shonkiness of their respective movies. So that's something.





## Biggest Deviation From the Series **DRAGON AGE II**

Though many folks rate on a binary scale of 'GOTY all years', or 'light my shotgun and shoot those developers with fire', it'd be madness to call this a bad game. It sure played different though. For starters, it felt one-third the length of *Origins*, offered one pre-defined character in one semi-linear plot and it all went down in a massively smaller world whose backdrops were repeated like an early Disney cartoon. And don't even get us started on the inclusion of Anders, the whinger. Top those structural changes off with button-mashy combat, and *Dragon Age II* felt like a reboot, not a direct follow-up.

## Runners-up **NEED FOR SPEED THE RUN**

When we race in a car game, we don't want to get out of the car. Ever. Not even if the ensuing footrace is choreographed by Michael Bay on red cordial. But *especially* not if it's quick-time central. Bah!

## RED FACTION ARMAGEDDON

What idiot thought this was a cracking idea? *Guerrilla* was a wondrous open-world with mechs and shenanigans aplenty. *Armageddon* stuffed us into linear caves and confiscated our toys. Boo-urns.

## Best Local Multiplayer **MODERN WARFARE 3 (SPEC OPS)**

This is all win. Features all the addictiveness of levelling up and killing with mates without the idiots and boosters. Spec Ops was a blast, but *Survival* is where it's at. Tactical. Replayable. Sublime.

## Most Innovative Game **L.A. NOIRE**

Studio founder Brendan McNamara's vision of 1940's Los Angeles was beautifully, painstakingly realised in the shops, the streets, the cars, the fashion, but the game's pinnacle achievement was the use of MotionScan for hitherto unthinkable fluid facial animation. Basically, 32 cameras record actors as they read dialogue, and then the performance is recreated in-game.

## Best Return of a Forgotten Mascot **RAYMAN ORIGINS**



We don't know of any hardcore Rayman fans, and the last time the French platform star was in his own dedicated PlayStation title was way back in 2004 on PS2. In the seven years since then he's more famous for the spin off series *Rayman Raving Rabbids*, but even then his name was dropped from the title. Then, *Origins*. The crisp, hand-drawn cartoon graphics belie the solid platforming-action underneath in a title that honestly plays better than it looks, rewarding explorers who can wall jump and slide into a sweet glut of coins but treating newcomers who'll wear a silly grin as they slapstick their way to the finish.



## Runners-up **SONIC GENERATIONS**

The blue blur's regarded as a bit of a joke, starring in second- and, hell, third-rate games for far too long. *Generations* takes him back to his roots with sensible modern interpretations on top. The first half of the game is the best, and the music is ace too.

## PAC-MAN CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION DX

We don't actually think anyone forgot about Pac-Man, but we do think he was regarded as being old-fashioned. This blistering return to form recreates the spirit of the original game and revamps it for a modern audience. Get it. It's amazing.



## Most Disappointing Game **SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED**

Three Japanese videogame luminaries, Suda51 (bloke who made *No More Heroes*), Shinji Mikami (responsible for the iconic *Resident Evil* series) and Akira Yamaoka (composed the music for most of the pants-browning *Silent Hill* series) get together to make an action-horror game. With their background and experience, what could go wrong? A lot, it turns out. It took Suda's wacky charm, Mikami's technical nous and Yamaoka's talent and produced something that didn't mix the three cohesively. It wasn't engaging, had zero replay value and felt like a step backwards. We're not expecting a sequel.

## Runners-up **F3.A.R.**

*F.E.A.R.* and *F.E.A.R. 2* were scary games that dared to do something different in the shooter genre. Despite the allure of a three-way showdown between the leading characters, *F3.A.R.* utterly failed to deliver any scares at all. Co-op was a bust, too.

## RAGE

We wonder how much id, the creators of the first person shooter, chewed on their nails as they considered the sheer pressure they were under to make *RAGE* genre-defining. Instead they gave us a faux open-world and crap racing mechanics.





# The OPS Awards 2011



## Best PSP game **TACTICS OGRE: LET US CLING TOGETHER**

We barely need the fingers on both hands to count the number of PSP titles released over the last year, and now with Vita a scant month away the handheld's about done. That doesn't mean you should toss it. This remarkably-named remake (the original was on PSone some 16 years ago) polished up its act and demonstrated that strategy RPGs could be wicked. It added a heartache-saving feature that took influence from modern games and allowed you to rewind your last 50 turns to make good on past mistakes. Don't scoff, it's rock-hard too, and is a stat-tweaker's dream. Cling.

## Best Worst game **RUGBY WORLD CUP**

This doesn't get the award simply because it scored 4/10, the highest score possible before scraping into 'pass' territory at (the still unattractive) 5/10. There have been games that have scored less this year. No, *Rugby World Cup* misses the point of its title entirely. The biggest slap to the face is that both Australia and New Zealand – the two best teams in the world – are missing from the game. The roster is incomplete, as only 10 out of 20 teams are included, and a good chunk of the teams that *did* give this travesty licence don't have their official strips or real player names. Oh, and it sold for \$99.95.



## Runners-up **JURASSIC PARK: THE GAME**

A sound idea that fills a curious gap in the movie's plot but misses the point of the setup. The *Jurassic Park* theme tune is absent. Any shred of tension is erased as you suffer another quick time event, and it didn't star any recognisable characters.

## CAPTAIN AMERICA: SUPER SOLDIER

Yes, yes, movie licenses always equal crap right? This generic, repetitive and bug-filled tripe defied expectation. The grab button meant instant death, and although Cappers was seen in cutscenes shooting a gun, none existed in-game.

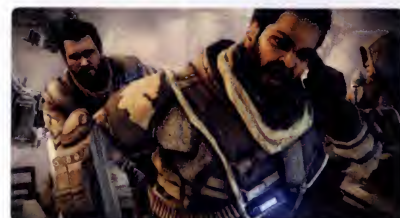
## Runners-up **SPELUNKER HD**

Let's get this out there straight away: *Spelunker HD* is not fun. It's an old game from 1983 given a bare-bones visual update, with the most pedantic and unclear mechanics ever. It teaches you things at the end of the tutorial that you needed to know at the start, and has the most inept adventurer ever. Blood-boiling.



## PUMA: AFTER HOURS ATHELETE

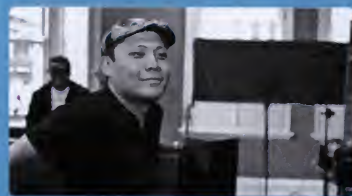
The principle was sound, the execution as flawed as trying to pin the tail on the donkey with an oar. Two out of the three sports here suffer from needing to hold a Move controller in a manner that a Move controller just shouldn't be held.



## Best Move game **KILLZONE 3**

The Move is a wonderful peripheral, but its potential is too-often squandered on mindless, pointless waggles. *Killzone 3* showed us just how viable and fun motion-based shooting could be.

## My Game of the Year



## PORTAL 2 Richie Young, - Ex Editor, OPS2

Incredible. Refreshing. Stephen Merchant. *Portal 2* is a game that can blow your mind. It's one that relies on creativity and puzzles to test you out; and it was a standout for that reason. There's a big shift right now to games with big budgets and prompted set pieces. While these are also incredible, new Ideas just can't be replicated.

## The Sore Knuckles Award for most frustrating game **DARK SOULS**

*Dark Souls* doesn't just teach you at the School of Hard Knocks. It punishes the lazy, unobservant player with death. There are minimal checkpoints and carking it dumps your precious, hard-earned souls on the spot, forcing you to trudge back to the point where you were slain and recover what you lost. Hope you don't get killed again, though, as that cache will disappear quicker than your patience and an entire afternoon's hard work. There's no pause button to put a hiatus on the seemingly undefeatable dragons, and mortal danger is seldom foreshadowed with an obvious warning. Get ready to die.



## Best Australian-made Game **L.A. NOIRE**

Forget the controversy, about how some Team Bondi workers were underpaid, yelled at and locked under the stairs, and focus on the results instead. *L.A. Noire* was big, bold and beautiful. AAA all the way.





## Most Addictive game **MASS EFFECT 2**

Though we have the memory of goldfish, and this released early on in the year, we can vividly recall being absolutely transfixed by Commander Shepard's adventure. Every mission was one more chance to entice new comrades and raise our chances of survival. Every conversation was an opportunity to get Kelly Chambers a bit more aroused by our presence. Every trip into space was an excuse to visit Uranus, probe it and titter like school children. This truly was a magical gaming experience and we've the highest hopes for the series' concluding chapter.



## The Most Hardcore game **FIFA 12**

You could dedicate every moment you have with your PS3 to getting better at *FIFA 12*. And dedication is what it takes to master this, though we're not convinced anyone could ever actually master it. There are just too many variables, options to tweak and explore amongst the stats, online modes and iterations of advanced techniques to string together on the field to do so. You need to not only be intimate with the sport, but have played previous versions *FIFA* that came before it to realise the differences. All that time you put into *FIFA 11*? That was just practice. We pity those that are coming into the series cold.

### Runners-up **F1 2011**

*Gran Turismo 5* may be the real driving simulator, but *F1 2011* is the real racing simulator. Life at the bottom of the ladder, where you're successful if you just finish the race, still requires brain surgeon levels of concentration.

### **LITTLEBIGPLANET 2**

It might look like a cute platformer with that hessian-headed mascot happily smiling on the cover, but *you* can make your own game using the tools at hand. It takes brains, guts and a lot of determination to get it right, too.

## Best Ending **PORTAL 2**

We were blown away by how emotionally draining a puzzle game could be. While there was a tense truce between GLaDOS and Chell, the threat of the murdering AI reneging and trapping you constantly lingered amongst the madness of multiple personality cores gibbering away as the building around you was self-destructing. Critical details that were casually dropped by the pre-recorded, dry-witted Cave Johnson a couple of hours previously dawned like a freight train exploding from a tunnel as you shot the very last portal. Nothing was certain in that ending, yet it tied together with a neat nod to the original.

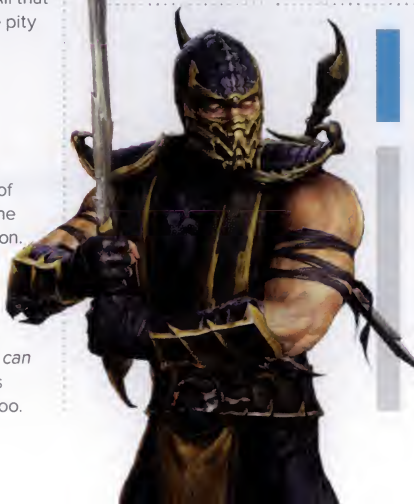


## Best Single Level **FIGHT NIGHT CHAMPION - LAST FIGHT AGAINST FROST**

Before we begin, yes, we know this was effectively scripted towards one outcome – but what a satisfying outcome it was. Nazi-poster boy Isaac Frost *needed to be knocked out* as he had been talking trash about you all damn game and he'd even beaten down your baby brother to boot (though that little punk deserved it). For the first time in the whole game you were forced to dance completely to your opponent's tune and to bide your time for a chance to turn the tables. The emotion we felt when it came time to rock him to the canvas was nothing short of glee.

## The Forbidden Fruit Award for the Best Game That You Can't Buy in Australia **MORTAL KOMBAT**

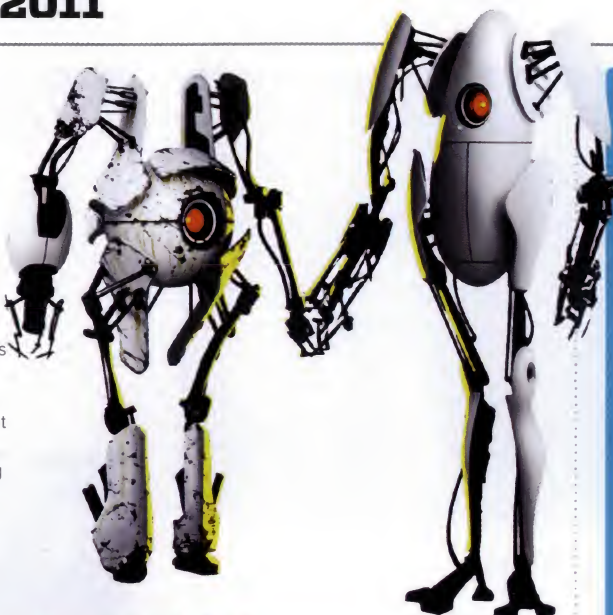
We went to Chicago to the brand-new NetherRealm studios to look at the series reboot. We went sceptical and came back convinced, and very amused. That was until the game was refused classification for excessive levels of violence. If you describe the violence in *MK*, you get the idea that it's a sadistic, deranged brawler. In the context of its over-the-top and pretty silly tone, it's still brutal but the representations within are so ridiculous that there's no chance you could take it seriously. However, the point is that a videogame was banned. We've been screaming for an R18+ rating for years for situations like this. We're told it's coming...





## Best Co-op PORTAL 2

Trust is a beautiful thing. Misplaced trust, infinitely more attractive. Recruiting a mate and navigating the Aperture mazes as ATLAS and P-body was great fun. To begin with we marvelled at the fact that we could perform joint 'gestures' such as waving or hugging. Soon after we marvelled at how easy it was to pretend to have our partner's best interests in mind whilst repeatedly dropping them in acid. But the beauty is, with no respawn countdown to worry about and a limitless supply of idiotic robots to trash neither party really cares about being rorted six ways from Sunday. We also appreciated that it had its own dedicated storyline separate from the main game. If you haven't done it already, go download the extra co-op missions in *Peer Review*.



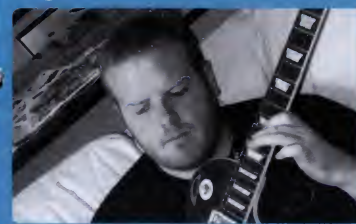
## Runners-up DEAD ISLAND

Tag-teaming a super zombie with three other mates was bludgeon bliss. This game proved without a doubt that our zombie escape plans are only viable if we have other humans to sacrifice for running time.

## OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RED RIVER

This game wasn't without its problems, but on the hardest difficulty and with the right group of trained specialists, the sense of teamwork was sublime. With zero HUD and trigger-happy Tajikistanis everywhere communication became absolutely paramount. Worth a budget look.

## My Game of the Year



## BATMAN: ARKHAM CITY Tristan Ogilvie - Ex Deputy Editor, OPS

If I said that lately I've been spending most of my weekends dressed up in tight black rubber, hanging out in dark alleys and getting triple-teamed by musclebound convicts in clown make-up, it would probably be the first and last time you invited me to be a guest speaker at your church. But hear me out, because if you haven't played *Batman: Arkham City* yet, then not only have you not played the best super hero game of all time, you've also managed to miss the most masterfully designed action adventure game of 2011. Batty. Beautiful. Brilliant.



## Best Sound BATTLEFIELD 3

If Dolby ever needed a poster product to champion its sound systems: this is it. We've all known for a long time that DICE are freaks when it comes to sound design, but *Battlefield 3* is head and shoulders above anything else they've ever attempted. The banter and battle chatter between your troops is

ultra-believable, but it's the guns themselves that steal the whole auditory act. You haven't truly fired a sniper rifle until you've unloaded a Dragunov in one of the reverberant valleys in *Battlefield 3*. With a loud enough sound system you can get your neighbours to hit the deck and call 000.



## Most Impractical Armour HUNTED: THE DEMON'S FORGE

Dear character designer, we know that technically this game is set in a 'fanatsy' world, but you're taking that too literally when you make the female protagonist this stripperiffic. E'lara chooses to protect her arse from swords and arrows with a leather g-banger and her chest protection consists of underboob, sideboob, pretty much any-which-boob-you-want boob. That shelf must have interested many a "hardened" adventurer.



## The Stinky Nappy award for scariest game DEAD SPACE 2

There are moments in this sequel that will stay with us forever. The nursery scene was exceptional, but it was the developer's ability to make us jump at the most common of things that was truly masterful.

## Most Dysfunctional Family F.E.A.R. 3

Your mother, Alma, who's a ghost, is about to give birth. You're just called Point Man, while your undead brother, Fettel – who you killed – is helping you find your mother to prevent the birth. Spoiler: one ending sees your brother *eating your mother*.





# Game of the Year

## UNCHARTED 3: DRAKE'S DECEPTION

It was one of the few games this year to get a perfect 10 from us. We love it, and you do too, making it your Game of the Year! It was a close battle at the top, with the epic *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* not far behind. Congratulations Naughty Dog!



### How the votes went

Uncharted 3	28%
The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim	25%
Batman: Arkham City	8%
Battlefield 3	8%
Portal 2	7%
L.A. Noire	5%
Deus Ex: Human Revolution	5%
Saints Row: The Third	5%
LittleBigPlanet 2	3%
Modern Warfare 3	3%
Disgaea 4	2%
WWE '12	<1%

### Your Game of the Year quotes for *Uncharted 3*

You know it means [a lot] to you when you feel sad at the potential death of a character.

**Josh Rochford, via email**

Through extensive offline and online multiplayer components and a story that sucks you in and keep you coming back, *Uncharted 3* is a game that will be played over and over again.

**Abraham Chalhoub, via email**

The masterpiece of 2011.

**Brendan Parsons, via email**

A masterpiece!

**Riley Proops, via Facebook**

If you can't seem to love characters like Nathan Drake or Victor Sullivan then I'm afraid you must be brain dead.

**Jonathan Spiroff, via email**

They should take *Uncharted 3* off the list so the other games of 2011 have a fighting chance.

**Paul McBride, via Facebook**

**And the winner, who wins themselves a copy of the game:**

The story was brilliant, the graphics are jaw-dropping, the gameplay is better than ever and some of the sequences made me think "HOLY CRAP THIS IS EPIC I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING!"

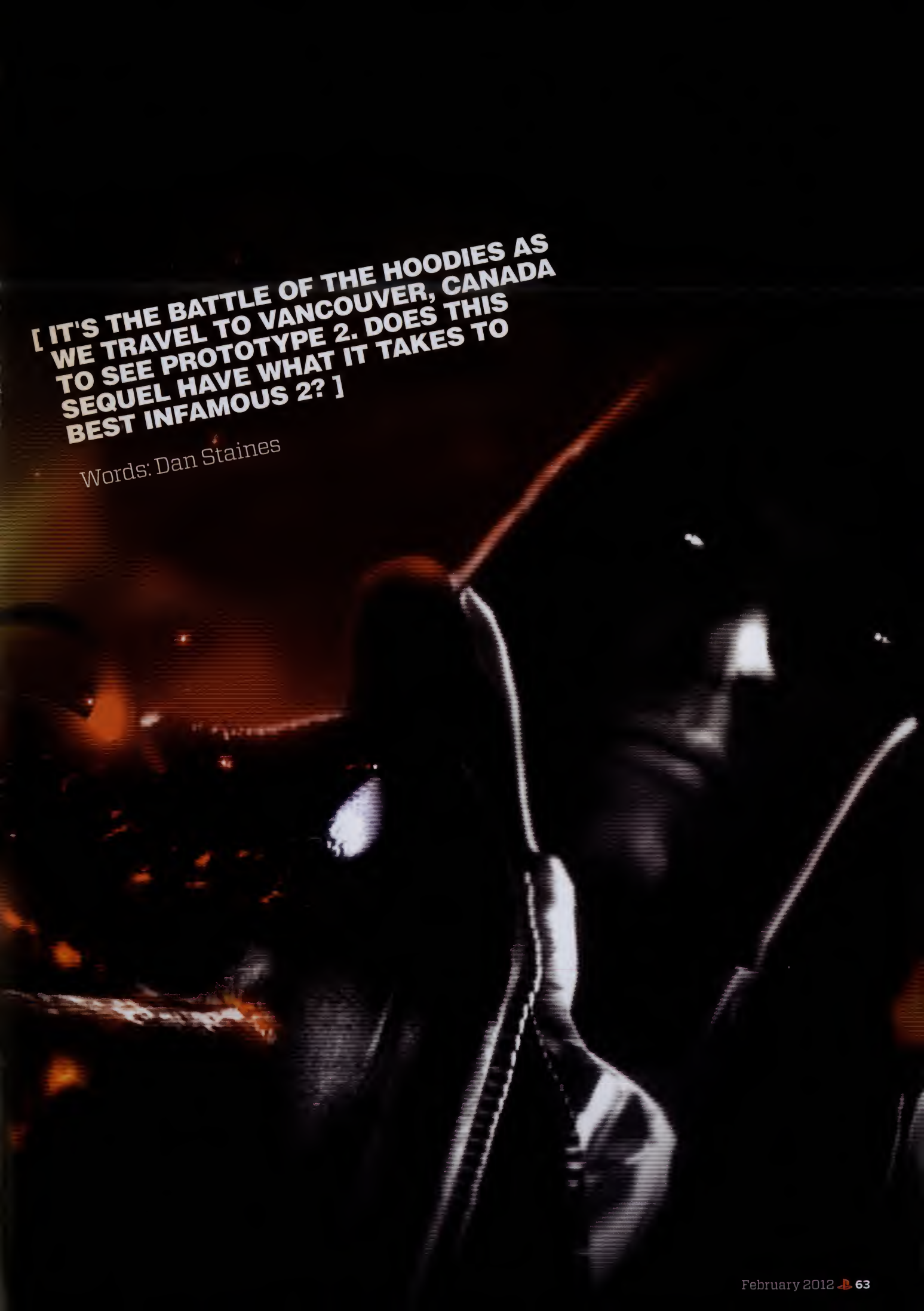
**Sam Harris, via email**





# [PROTOTYPE2] MUTATION SENSATION





**[ IT'S THE BATTLE OF THE HOODIES AS  
WE TRAVEL TO VANCOUVER, CANADA  
TO SEE PROTOTYPE 2. DOES THIS  
SEQUEL HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO  
BEST INFAMOUS 2? ]**

Words: Dan Staines



# [HELLER] vs MERCER





## HANDS-ON WITH RADICAL'S ULTIMATE POWER FANTASY

"At the beginning of *Prototype 2*, the very first thing we did was look at all feedback we could find," explains Radical design director Matt Armstrong. "Online, print, all of the blogs, all of the forums – we got a post-mortem from Activision telling us what they thought worked and what hadn't – and we saw very similar feedback come through on all channels. It started to define a very clear roadmap for us in terms of what *Prototype 2* needed to be."

Invited to come play a preview build of the game in Radical's (impossibly awesome) Vancouver headquarters, we've seen the roadmap to which Armstrong refers: the blueprint for *Prototype 2*. At the high-concept level, it consists of four marketing slogans/design mantras: 1) Murder your Maker, 2) Become the Perfect Predator 3) The Ultimate Power Fantasy, and 4) *Prototype* for the Masses.

They might not seem like much, but these simple phrases are the pillars upon which *Prototype 2* is built. They are its guiding philosophy, accrued from Radical's years of experience polishing and perfecting its unique interpretation of the open-world genre. Insofar as there's a straight line connecting (the criminally underappreciated) *Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*, the original *Prototype*, and *Prototype 2*, you could argue the latter has really been in development for almost ten years.

Small wonder it's looking so good, then.

## MURDER YOUR MAKER

In Armstrong's words, one of Radical's biggest goals for *Prototype 2* is to "tell the story of someone who's a victim of the events that transpired in the first *Prototype*." That someone is James Heller. A decorated veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, Heller was stationed overseas during the Blacklight viral outbreak in New York. Having instructed his wife and child to stay in the doomed metropolis, he returns home weeks later to find both dead: victims of the virus. Stricken with grief and no small amount of guilt, Heller leaves the army (honourable discharge) and joins a Blackwatch security detail in what used to be the Nine Burroughs.

His goal? To find and kill Alex Mercer – protagonist of *Prototype*.

You can tell just by looking at him that Heller is a very different man to his quarry. Clearly inspired by parkour... uh... doing guys, Mercer is lithe and sinewy, like a hoodie-wearing jungle cat. Conversely, Heller looks like a bear with the strength of two bears: a rage-twitching mound of brute force incarnate. And the difference is more than skin-deep.

"There is a major character difference between Alex Mercer and James Heller," Armstrong says. "[Mercer] comes from a scientific background, so he's an analytical character – he's someone who thinks a lot and doesn't actually talk a huge amount. But Heller is somebody who is military through and through. He's somebody that's used to finding himself in very dangerous situations, and acting assertively."

Heller is a much more relatable, much more human protagonist than Mercer. His story is a simple one, but packs emotional punch. We are encouraged to sympathise with his loss and share his rage. As YouTube commenter Marzniper 14 put it after watching the popular 'Homecoming' teaser trailer:

"[I] didn't like [Mercer] all that much, but Heller I can relate to. He lost his family, so I imagine if my family was dead, I would f-ck up Mercer for starting the virus outbreak."

Playing the murdered family card isn't exactly the most subtle or sophisticated way to engage your audience's natural empathy, but clearly it works. Even for jaded cynics like us, there's a raw emotional immediacy to Heller's story that's difficult to resist. By contrast, Mercer's narrative – although clever in its own way – was too complicated for its own good and alienated players as a result.

"So much of the first game was predicated on conspiracy, and it's actually inherently hard to follow a

conspiracy," Armstrong observes. "We wanted to tell a much, much clearer story this time around, where, at every single step, the player always understands what the main character's motivations are and what they're actually driving towards."

## MEET YOUR MURDERER

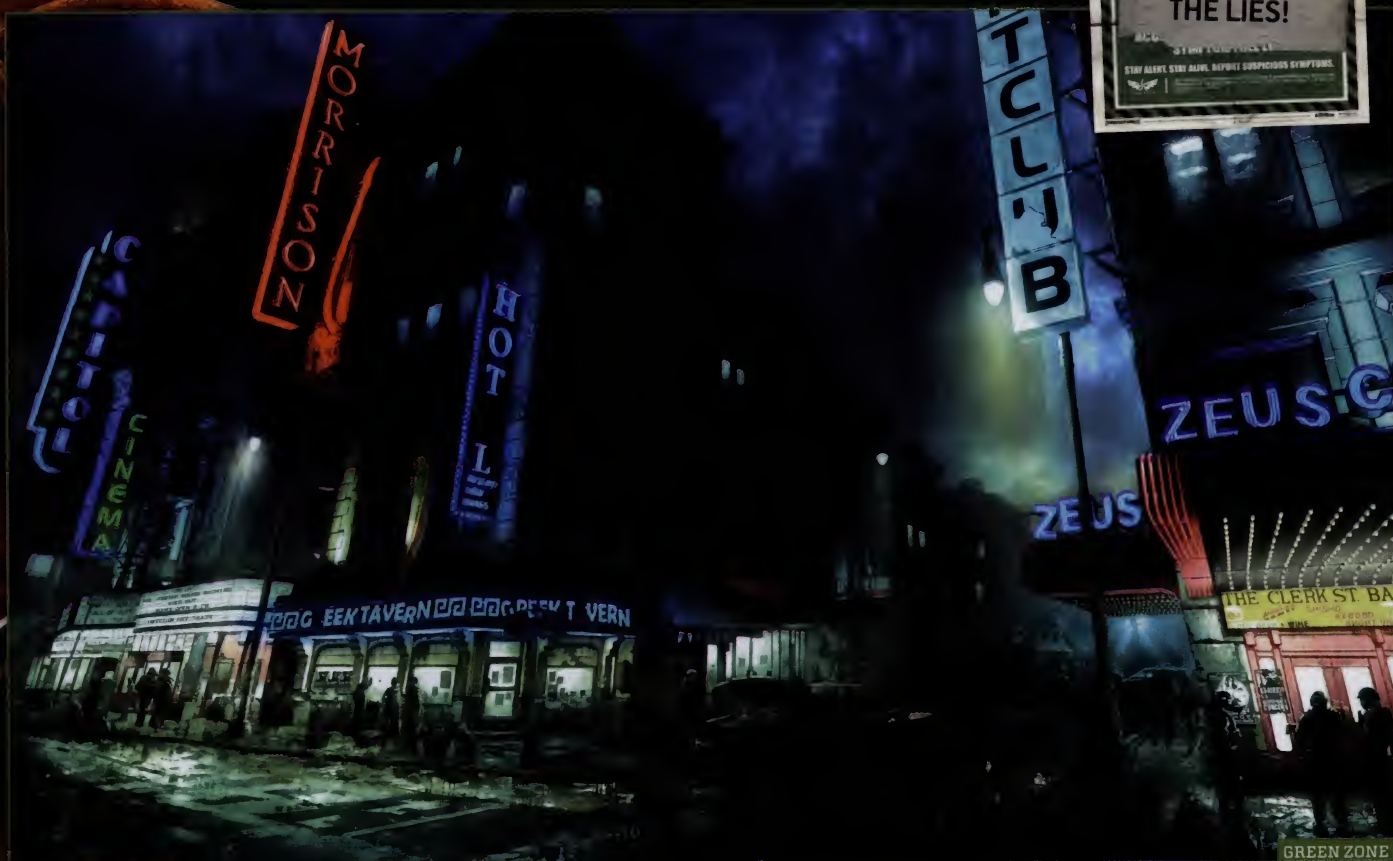
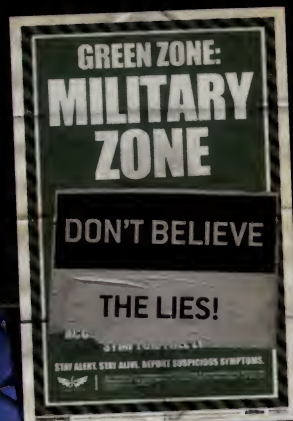
We open with Heller smouldering in the back of a Blackwatch APC while his so-called colleagues joke about brutalising the citizens of New York. The scene is stylised: black and white with occasional splashes of crimson – a bit like *Sin City* but not quite so noir. From his silence and the sullen-yet-determined expression on his face, it's obvious Heller is a million miles away, preoccupied with the loss of his family and with Alex Mercer. He isn't a mercenary – he's not out for easy money like the assholes and thugs that make up the rest of his platoon. He's out for justice, or at least what he perceives as such.

Explosions. The APC is tossed violently into the air and comes crashing down to earth again with a sickening crunch. The impact kills everyone inside – save a single obvious exception. A few moments pass to the pop and crackle of naked flames. Heller regains consciousness, staggers out of the crippled vehicle, and is immediately confronted with the cause of the crash: it kneels beside a corpse, not more than twenty-five meters away.

It is Alex Mercer.

Not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, Heller takes out his massive-and-in-no-way-compensating-for-something bowie knife and brutally slashes Mercer's throat. Then he does it again. And again. ▶

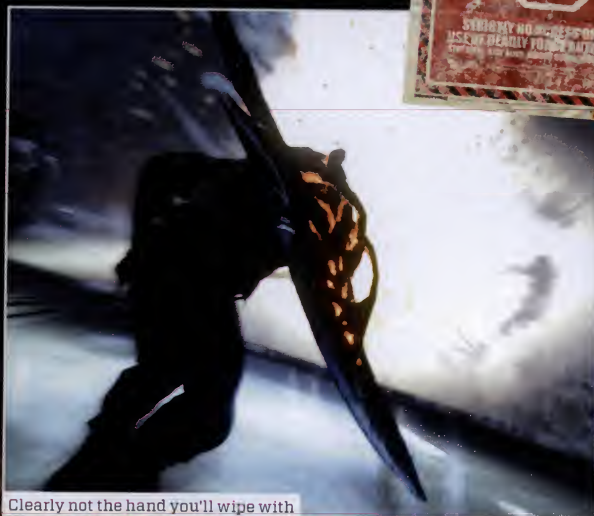
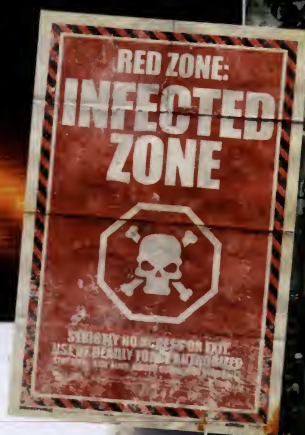
[ YOUR STORY IS A SIMPLE ONE, BUT PACKS EMOTIONAL PUNCH ]





[ THE EXACT NATURE  
OF [JAMES HELLER'S]  
TRANSFORMATION  
WILL DEPEND ON THE  
DECISIONS YOU MAKE ]

"Remember kids, we parked underneath  
the giant blood booger" Yes dad



Clearly not the hand you'll wipe with



And again and again. Not a drop of blood spilt. Mercer snorts bitterly, rises slowly and deliberately to his feet, and – with fleshy tendrils that spring writhing from his forearm – flings his dumbstruck assailant into a wall with the force of a cannonball.

He laughs. Heller is beaten.

## BECOME THE PERFECT PREDATOR

At the height of his virus-enhanced powers, Mercer is a formidable opponent indeed. For Heller to have any chance at all of bringing down such powerful prey, he is obliged to become a well-honed killing machine – a perfect predator who effortlessly stalks the New York skyline, striking from above with the explosive fury of an atom bomb. The exact nature of this transformation will depend on the decisions you make, both in choosing which powers you want to develop and in what order you approach the game's numerous story missions. Armstrong explains:

"Because of the branching nature of the missions in the game, different players will acquire powers in different orders, which means that certain missions will play out differently later on depending on which abilities you have."

Of course, it's no good having a cool power if you don't know how to use it properly. By the team's own admission, this was one of the big problems with the first *Prototype*, and one they've striven hard to rectify in the sequel. The power shop is gone: instead

of purchasing critical powers, players now acquire them automatically during the course of the story. By introducing powers this way, Radical can ensure that players appreciate their purpose and function to the fullest extent.

"We want to give players an opportunity to play around with those powers in a situation that shows them off in their best light," says Armstrong. "That way we can make sure the player 'gets it' – that they understand why this new tool they've got is so cool and how best to use it."

## TRANSFORMATION

Heller wakes up on a dirty concrete floor in what looks like a converted factory space, but converted to what is difficult to determine. On the far wall, in what could have once been a foreman's office, a gaggle of prattling scientists and hard-nosed military men peer down at their prize from behind thick glass and loudly debate how he ought to be slaughtered. Eventually it's decided that fire is the best option.

"I can hear you, you know!" yells Heller.

Seconds later, with a sound like waterfalls, plumes of flame burst forth from hidden pipes and engulf the factory floor in explosive conflagration. Sluggish and aching from his confrontation with Mercer, Heller doesn't make a sound as the inferno lifts him from his feet and deposits him charred and bubbling into a pile of rubble on the other side of the room.

"Send a team down there. We have to make sure."



We don't even want to know what's going on here



That's not a kni- no wait, it is



[ HELLER DOESN'T MAKE A SOUND AS THE INFERNO LIFTS HIM FROM HIS FEET AND DEPOSITS HIM CHARRED AND BUBBLING INTO A PILE OF RUBBLE ]



RED ZONE



YELLOW ZONE



## I ♥ NY

The New York of *Prototype 2* is divided into three zones: Green, Yellow, and Red. Here's a quick rundown of each:

**The Green Zone** is where Blackwatch – the key military faction in the game – have set up base. As such, it's a heavily militarised zone, but still it's probably the closest to normality that you'll find in the game.

**The Yellow Zone** is where all the people who fled the initial outbreak in *Prototype* ended up. It's a quarantine zone where there's far too many people crammed into too small a space.

**The Red Zone** is the Manhattan of the first game, but showing the scars of the war that was fought on its soil. Huge skyscrapers with enormous holes punched in – many collapsed – and massive viral tendrils everywhere. Not pleasant.

Heller listens, and waits, watching with mute amazement as his still-smoking skin and muscles rejuvenate before his eyes. Whatever Mercer did back there... whatever that injection was... it changed him. He wasn't human anymore. He was something else.

What had he become?

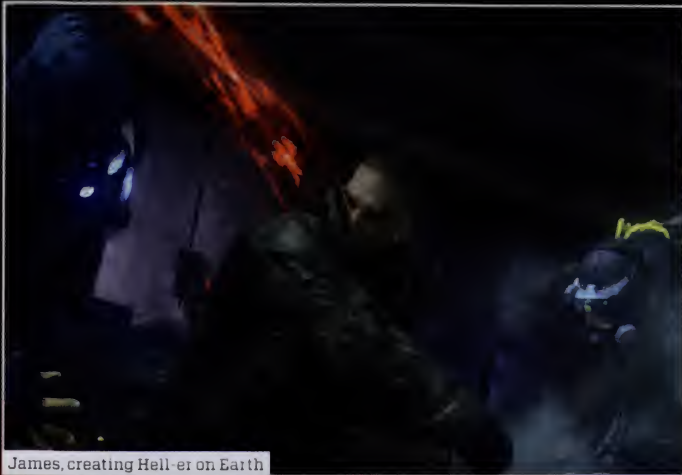
## THE ULTIMATE POWER FANTASY

It's not hard to see why Radical would consider *Prototype 2* the ultimate power fantasy. Like all superhero games, and *Prototype 2* is ultimately a superhero game of sorts, it trades on its ability to engender a kind of symbiotic connection between the player and protagonist. In a nutshell, the player gives the protagonist life, and in turn the protagonist makes the player feel like a badass. James Heller is an especially effective protagonist in this regard for two reasons:

**ONE:** Attitude. As discussed above, Heller is driven and relatable. Unlike Mercer, who often came across as a bit of a prick, Heller seems like a guy you could feasibly share a beer with, but he's also clearly very capable and assertive, and just a leeeetle bit unhinged. He's not unlike *The Punisher* in many respects, though not nearly so grim.

**TWO:** Ability. At the zenith of his development, Heller is absurdly powerful – even moreso than Mercer before him. As well as having all of his predecessor's abilities, including the Claws, Blade Arm, Hammerfist, and Whip, Heller also possesses his own unique skills, such as the ability to summon a squad of mutant henchmen. When asked to tell us about his favourite new power in the game, Armstrong is quick to respond:





James, creating Hell-er on Earth

## [ YOU CAN GRAB SOMEBODY, INJECT THEM WITH THE VIRUS, AND TURN THEM INTO A LIVING GRENADE ]

"I have to say the biobomb is my favourite power. You can grab somebody, inject them with the virus, and turn them into a living grenade. Then you pitch them out into the distance, and they explode in a spray of tendrils that reach out, grab everything within reach, and draw it back to the explosion's epicentre."

Given an opportunity to play around with a fully specced Heller later in the day, the first thing we do is attract the attention of a Blackwatch Strike Force – *Prototype's* equivalent of the five/six star po-po – and whip out a biobomb. The result is glorious to behold. Lashing out in all directions, tendrils compress an assault helicopter, two cars, and half-a-dozen soldiers into a single, explosive singularity. It is pure chaos with an appealing emergent quality that makes you want to keep doing it – just to see what happens.

Heller's ability to weaponise enemy vehicles is also something we found ourselves using with gleeful regularity. We struggle to think of anything more badass than jumping on a tank, ripping off its gatling gun, and using it to blow up a helicopter. Except maybe jumping on a helicopter, ripping off its missile launcher, and using it to blow up a tank.

### PROTOTYPE FOR THE MASSES

Notwithstanding the fact that it obviously sold enough copies to justify a sequel, the first *Prototype* was not exactly the most accessible game on the market. Aside from the impenetrable narrative, unpleasant protagonist, and intimidating controls, it was also simply quite difficult – and not in a good way.

"The first *Prototype* was actually an incredibly difficult game," Armstrong admits sheepishly. "It wasn't just difficult, it was unfairly difficult in a lot of different ways. There were a lot of occasions, for example, where you were hit by things that were coming from off-screen, or you were caught up in an unbreakable combo, or just ganged-up on by enemies. It felt like we were giving you all these incredible powers, and then stopped you from actually enjoying them."

So does this mean *Prototype 2* is an easier game than its predecessor? Not exactly. The underlying goal behind the "*Prototype* for the Masses" slogan is not to dumb the game down so much as it is to make it less frustrating and more accessible. The previously discussed tutorialisation of critical powers is a part of this: it's a simple little feature that enhances the experience for newcomers without diminishing it for the hardcore. But the concept extends further than that, beyond game mechanics to everything from the design of the interface to the way secondary missions are contextualised and integrated into the broader



narrative. Hence the genesis of Blacknet.

"Blacknet is a key part of our effort to make sure peripheral content always feeds back into the main narrative and supports the kind of story we want to tell," says Armstrong.

Blacknet is exemplified by the Blacknet trucks, which Heller can hack into to dig up details about ongoing Blackwatch operations and key personnel associated with them. Then, by using a new mechanic referred to as hunting – which is described by Armstrong as kind of "organic sonar" – you can find these people, consume them, and thereby gain access to additional mission content. Completing that will net you a new chunk of story and mutations to upgrade your character.

Succinctly put, side missions are no longer abstract and arbitrary. You're not doing things because the game tells you to do them: you're doing

them because they make sense within the context of the narrative. The result is a more compelling experience, and one that's easier for newcomers and casuals – the masses – to appreciate.

### RADICAL THOUGHTS

Asked to summarise what he feels makes *Prototype 2* interesting and unique, Armstrong thinks for a moment and then grins broadly.

"There's something about the combination of powers and abilities you have in this game that's quite unlike anything else that's out there," he says. "It's an experience that brings a smile to your face. One of the questions we always ask ourselves whenever we do something in the game is: 'Does that make me feel awesome?' If the answer is yes, it goes in; if no, it doesn't. That's *Prototype 2*."

Sounds about right to us.



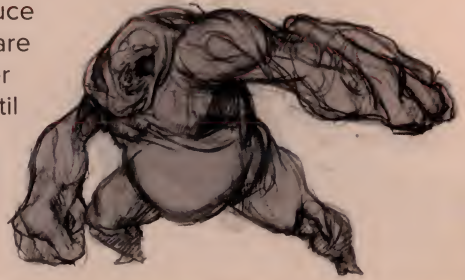


## CREATING A JUGGERNAUT

During our time at Radical's studios, we were given an opportunity to document how the team works together to create an enemy character from scratch. Here's how it goes:

### CONCEPTION

Concept artists produce rough sketches that are gradually refined over multiple iterations until a version emerges that pleases the team.



### CONSTRUCTION

Once the concept is approved, 3D character artists begin researching references for various details, adding dozens of little touches and tweaks to the overall design.



### ANIMATION

When the 3D mesh is complete, it's handed over to the animators, who must answer questions like "How does it stand?" "How does it move?" and of course "How do we kill it?"




### IMPLEMENTATION

Designers take the animated mesh and import it into the game, where – using a proprietary tool called GYM – they can tweak its characteristics, behaviour and animations on the fly until it looks and behaves exactly right.

[ ONE OF THE QUESTIONS WE ALWAYS ASK OURSELVES WHENEVER WE DO SOMETHING IN THE GAME IS: 'DOES THAT MAKE ME FEEL AWESOME?' ]





# KNOW HOW TO USE A COMPUTER?

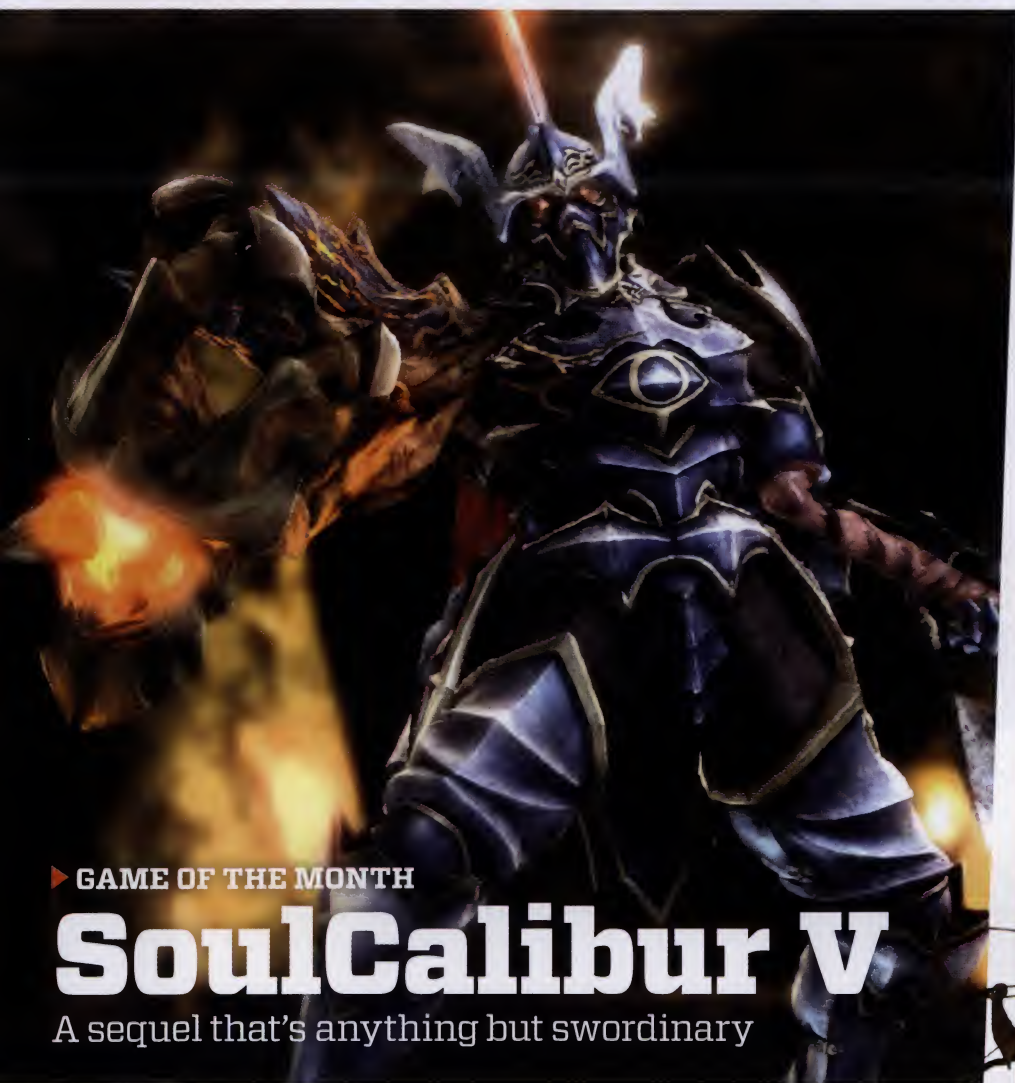
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# in review



► GAME OF THE MONTH

## SoulCalibur V

A sequel that's anything but swordinary

## Review ratings

- 10 Incredible:** Perfection is relative and elusive, and no game will ever be *perfect*. Our 10 doesn't mean a game is flawless, it means a game has done everything it set out to do in an incredible fashion and thus it deserves our highest possible kudos.
- 9 Excellent:** An outstanding game, either limited by its scope, sequel status (and lack of improvement) or a few too many minor blemishes from being a 10. Likely one of the best in its genre, a 9 comes with very high praise.
- 8 Great:** Still well ahead of the pack in most departments despite a few issues here and there. Thoroughly recommended.
- 7 Good:** A robust package that does a solid job despite a handful of mild to moderate problems. Enjoyable in parts, just not fantastic overall.
- 6 Decent:** This game will have some noticeable flaws that may make it hard to recommend to those who aren't fans of the genre, but it will do more right than it does wrong. Just.
- 5 Mediocre:** A conceded pass, if you know what we mean. Half okay, but half-busted. Might scrape by for fans, but with the quality games we do have, there's no need to drop real money on a game that half sucks.
- 4 Poor:** Anything below 5, strictly speaking, is a fail – but there are degrees of 'bad' just as there are degrees of 'good'. A 4 is unrefined, partially broken and poorly designed.
- 3 Very disappointing:** Things start to go very wrong here – fundamentally flawed in many ways, boring and close to pointless.
- 2 Terrible:** Nothing good here, and definitely not worth removing the wrapper.
- 1 The worst:** Reserved for the very worst gaming could ever offer. A broken, offensive mess without a single redeeming quality. If a 10 is better than virtually every game available, a 1 is worse than virtually every game available. OPS has handed out this score only once.

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▲ We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Sony Bravia for the best picture possible. We choose to play our games using the Turtle Beach PX5 headsets for awesome surround sound. [www.turtlebeachheadsets.com.au](http://www.turtlebeachheadsets.com.au)



Siegfried's usual response to somebody stealing his shampoo

# SoulCalibur V

A tale of souls, swords and medieval lycra eternally retold

**Play this if you like**

*SoulCalibur IV*

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3  
**GENRE:** FIGHTING  
**RELEASE:** FEB 2  
**DISTRIBUTOR:**  
NAMCO BANDAI  
PARTNERS  
**DEVELOPER:**  
PROJECT SOUL  
**PLAYERS:** 1-2  
**RRP:** \$99.95

Fighting game junkies, much like regular junkies, crave speed. Look back through the history of 2D fighters, and the ever-improving hardware that conveyed them, and it's easy to chart the evolution of acceleration. Up until recently 3D fighters had been noticeably slower than the blitzkriegs of their sprite-based brethren. That gap closed dramatically when *Street Fighter IV* showed us that we could have the best of both worlds: gorgeous 3D visuals and mongoose-fast responses. *SoulCalibur V* reels that distance in even further.

The results of Project Soul's pace tinkering is immediately felt. All returning fighters have greyer hair and deeper voices, but there's no thought of arthritis when they're zinging across the screen in daredevil displays of destruction. Though our main-man, Mitsurugi, has had his moveset streamlined down (yet again), we were amazed by how much faster he had become. Project Soul has slipped everybody a Red Bull it seems, as even the

lumbering Astaroth is spry. He was starting to look broken, until we cottoned on to the new tactics.

The tempo of the average three round battle is increased by the implementation of Quick Step, Guard Burst/Just Guard, Brave Edge, and Critical Edge. The Quick Step harkens right back to *Soul Blade*, where a shrewd double tap upwards or downwards rewards you with a blur effect, a dodge and an opportunity to thrash your opponents' kidneys. It's as simple as it is tactically effective and we love using it.

The Just Guard/Guard Burst is obviously the cousin of the previous games Just Impact/Guard Impact counter system, but with a twist. Rather than hit block and a direction – in an often disingenuous and spammy hope to parry attacks – Guard Burst only requires a more timely press of the block button. Do it right and you get more time to respond with a counter.

The last two switch-ups are Critical Edge and Brave Edge and these are real game-changers. You now have an Edge

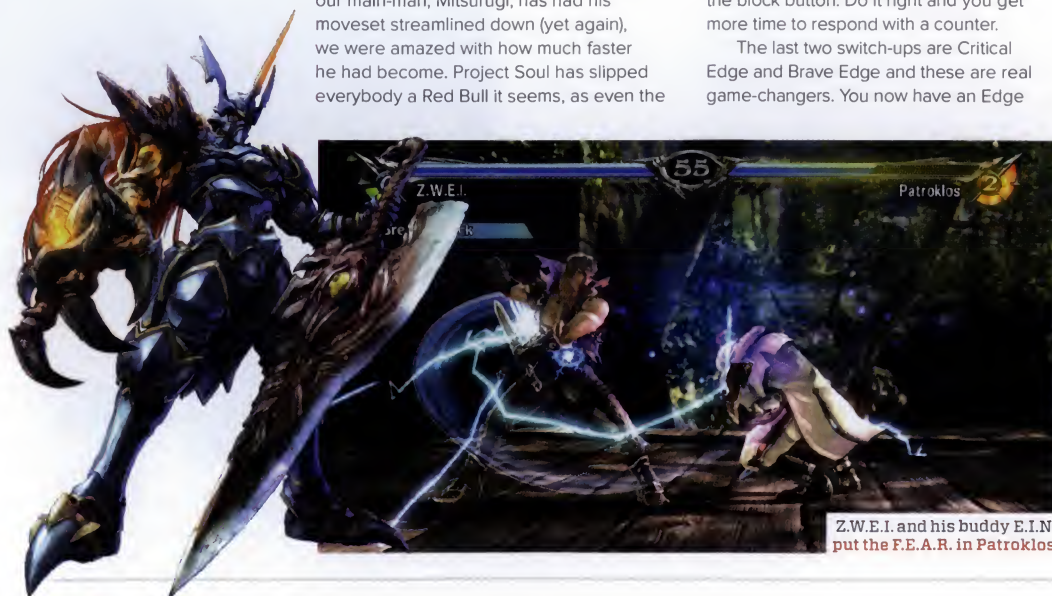
meter that, much like *Street Fighter IV*'s Ultra meter, engorges every time you cop or deal damage. Earn enough and you can do a Critical Edge, which is the rough equivalent of a *Streeties* super move. We like it a hell of a lot more than the Critical Finish mechanic of the last game as the command is pretty much the same input for everybody (double hadoken with all three attack buttons).

Brave Edge assaults can also be called into play by performing certain moves followed immediately by pressing A+B+K before the attack connects. They require half your Edge Meter, but the results are pretty brutal. This too, we dig.

Project Soul has clearly focussed on making every character accessible for all levels of players. Ivy in particular isn't such a dominatrix to learn for any player wishing to be intimately familiar with her combos. That may sound like a nerf-fest, but it didn't feel that way to us. There's a balance in this roster unlike anything we've seen in previous *SoulCalibur* titles and the new mechanics give strategy to the master, not exploitable shortcuts for the bashers.

With regards to characters, there are close to 30 in all and that stable is a half 'n' half of new and returning faces. If your character didn't make the cut, relax, in true *SoulCalibur* tradition, they're still here in spirit, just hiding behind a more youthful looking exterior with more powerful moves to discover. The brand new additions to the roster, while odd-looking, are more hit than miss. Ezio is an obvious favourite as he's deadly at close range, but also has his crossbow for long-range high or low shots (which are dodged with the quickstep).

Other newbies include Pyrrha, a more apologetic version of Sophitia who kicks substantially more arse and comes with a secondary form; Patroklos her younger brother who's an aggressive combo



Z.W.E.I. and his buddy E.I.N. put the F.E.A.R. in Patroklos



“The best use of [Viola’s orb] is to detach and leave it in the arena, then recall it so it intersects with back of an enemy’s head”



For reasons that aren't fully explained, Pyrrha trusts somebody who looks like this



You rebel scum

Maxi has nunchuk holsters. Coolness overload



thwarter and also has another form; and Natsu, a disciple of Taki who lacks her master's improbable udders but is stronger and 'teleporty'.

As always, there are two especially eccentric characters in the roster; one we like, the other not so much. Z.W.E.I. the werewolf man with his wolf torso sidekick isn't our cup of tea, but it's hard not to respect how his offside warps in to elongate the kid's combos to confuse range.

Alternatively, Viola is a refreshingly fun freak, thanks to her bizarre claw and an orb combos. When the orb is "attached" it gives her a bit more range, but the best use of it is to detach and leave it in the arena, then recall it in a way that intersects with the back of your enemy's head. This trap-laying is a blast when it works.

There are some great ideas in *SoulCalibur V*. It's a pity then that as Project Soul take a step forward in gameplay, they take another right back with the dearth of single-player modes. The challenge-based, unlock-fest that was Tower of Souls is gone, replaced by a Quick Battle mode

that randomly simulates "human players" and their create-a-characters. Also, though you're given greater free-reign to make a create-a-character that's truly unique, it's all aesthetic this time. Equipment you unlock does not imbue you with bonuses. Considering the story mode is two hours long, offers no surprises and dictates which player you must use, there's not a lot of meat here for the soloist.

It's such a shame. We love the fighting that is present in *SoulCalibur V* because it's fast, inventive and approachable; but those improvements are all but squandered on threadbare single-player that's basically a bootcamp for pushing players online. That transition is fine if you've got the mad skills. However, newcomers may find that *SoulCalibur V* will too soon limit them to either replaying quick battles *ad infinitum* (to unlock useless hairstyles and arse-less chaps), or going online to be thoroughly panted by the grandmasters. **Adam Mathew**

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** Beautiful backdrops and the action is flashtacular and fast. This is definitely a step up on last time.

**SOUND** Pyrrha's apologising pisses us off. We prefer the old announcer, too.

**CONTROLS** The new mechanics flow perfectly after a small amount of adjustment.

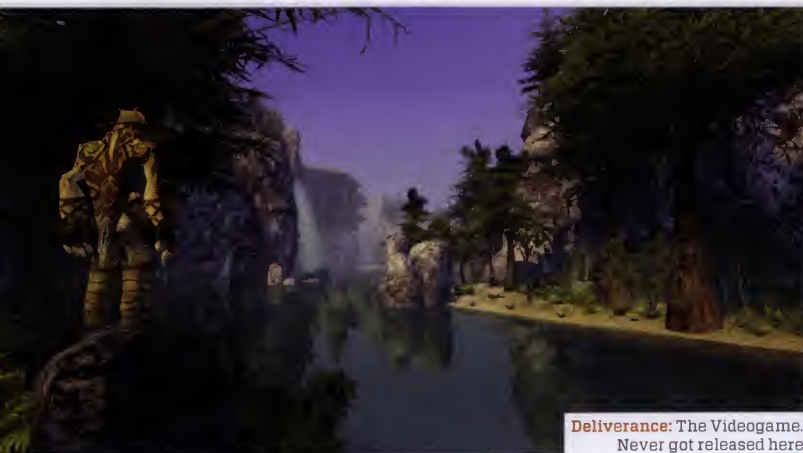
**REPLAY VALUE** Lots, if you're skilled enough to hold your own online. Else there's unlockable gear and a Player Level to grind through with little reward.

## Verdict

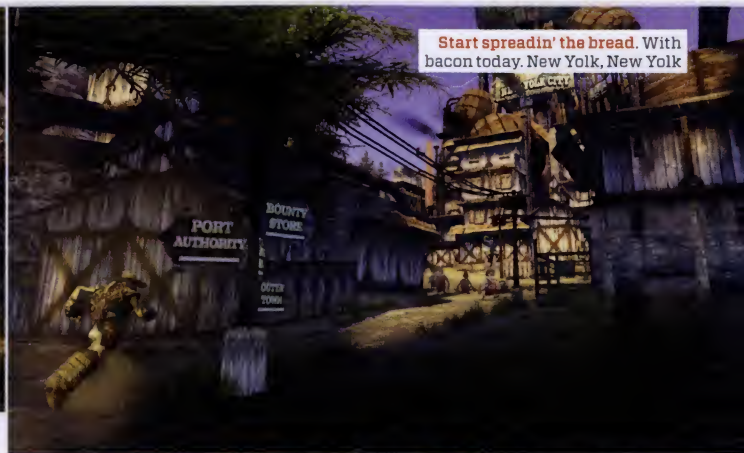
This is one of the best playing *SoulCaliburs* of the bunch, but it's also the thinnest in solo play content.

8





**Deliverance:** The Videogame. Never got released here



**Start spreadin' the bread.** With bacon today. New York, New York

# Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

Well worth a few dollars more

**Play this if you like**

Oddworld: Abe's Odyssey

**Info**

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** FPS/ PLATFORMER

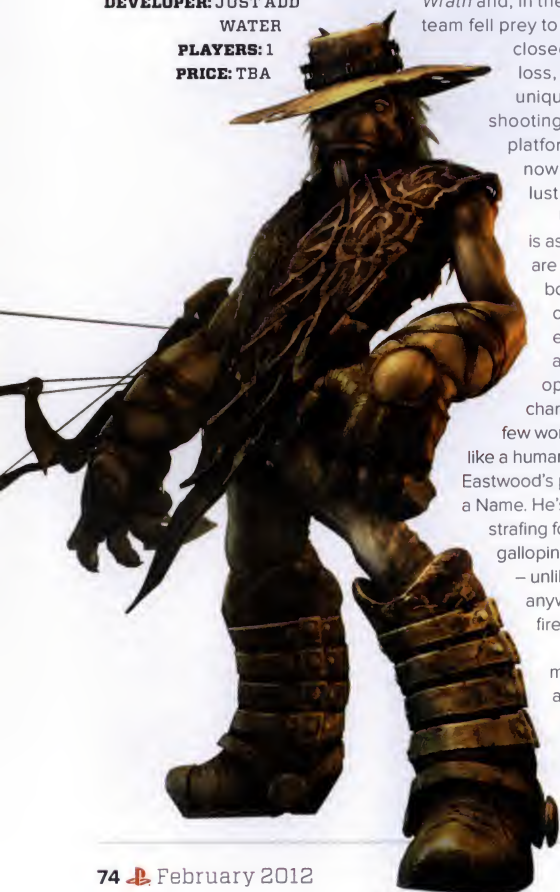
**RELEASE:** JAN 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:** TBA

**DEVELOPER:** JUST ADD WATER

**PLAYERS:** 1

**PRICE:** TBA



At the dawn of PlayStation, the Oddworld series and its hero, Abe the malnourished mudokon, were synonymous with Sony. At the height of its popularity developer Oddworld Inhabitants then zigged when it should have zagged by entrusting its IP to a semi-interested EA and the fledgling Xbox system. The resulting exclusivity deal meant many PS faithful never saw *Munch's Odyssey*, or *Oddworld Stranger's Wrath* and, in the fullness of time, the team fell prey to the Glukkons (suits) and closed. *Munch's* was no great loss, but *Stranger's* was a unique hybrid of first-person shooting and third-person platforming – a rare gem that's now been polished to a lustrous, HD shine.

Unsurprisingly, the premise is as odd as they come. You are Stranger, a fearsome bounty hunter who bags outlaws in order to earn enough 'moolah' to pay for a mysterious life-saving operation. He's a fascinating character who draws what few words he utters and looks like a humanoid lion crossed with Clint Eastwood's poncho stylin' Man Without a Name. He's just as comfortable circle-strafing folks on two feet as he is galloping around on all fours and – unlike any shooter protagonist anywhere, ever – despises firearms.

Cue the entrance of a multi-purpose crossbow and the 'live ammunition' system, which is literally bullets made of the unfortunate critters you find roaming about the overworld. Frankly, it



**Inbred Dead Redemption**

was a great idea for a mechanic then, and it's just as awesome now. Each of your 'bullets' twitch and squeal as they wait to be slung at some deadbeat on the lam and there are nine different types that can open up broad possibilities for approach. You can unleash Zapfflys (unlimited multi-purpose ammo), Bolamites (mini-spiders that ensnare with webs), Chippunks (smart-arses who lure enemies by insulting them), Stingbees (homing machine gun rounds), Fuzzles (psychotic mines) and Stunkz (cause incapacitating vomit fits). Rounding out the ordinance you also get Thudslugs (one hit KOs), Boombats (timed bombs) and Sniper Wasps (guess what they do and don't win a prize).

The gameplay is surprisingly tight after all these years, and Just Add Water has done a remarkable job remaking this five year old game. The audio has been redone, the textures can be displayed in 720p without making us think we've lost a contact lens and the character models have had their polys upped as well. However, it's the things Just Add Water *didn't* need to change that make this awesome.

There's a wealth of ideas and unique charm in this genre-bender that are timelessly cool. We lost ourselves all over again in this whimsical Wild West pisstake where the bounties are badass and the townsfolk are inbred chicken-people. Likewise, it's a pleasure to be given so much freedom in a shooter to do go where we want, solve problems and bag bosses with any concoction of stealth/gung-ho/entrapment tactics in any camera view you please.

It's great to see the Oddworld series return to the system from whence it sprung, and *Stranger's Wrath* is the best of the bunch. It's also a damn fine game regardless of how much water has gone under the bridge. **Adam Mathew**



## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** Oddly pretty. Textures redone, character models redone. Coasts along at 60fps.

**SOUND** Easily half the charm of the Oddworld universe. Inbred mutants never sounded this funny.

**CONTROLS** Some strange, old-school button layouts, but easily tweaked into something useable.

**REPLAY VALUE** No multiplayer and exploring is annoyingly halted towards the end game.

## Verdict

A unique mishmash of platformer and shooter that still plays great.

8



"If you're effective and you know it, shoot the player"  
Ka-booom! "No, no. That's the car we came here in"

"Job Good, fellow Yankee man! We had a combat and licked their asses!"

Hidden behind your gun: two cave trolls feasting on your legs

# Heavy Fire: Afghanistan

Situation: Über FUBAR

**H**heavy Fire: Afghanistan talks a big game on its box, but in reality it's the anti-Battlefield 3, the non-CoD. Medal of Honor. It's what would happen if the US Army and Disneyland got drunk and built an animatronic theme ride called Targets of the Kabul-region. Their budget: \$9.35.

When the blurb tells you "there's no way but forward, and no choice but victory!", take it as a literal warning. This is an on-rails experience that can be felled in an hour and a bit because the average enemy is so stupid he needs an arrow tattooed on his genitals to remind him which way to pee. Any bullet or fluid they spray at you is purely coincidental.

We imagine *Heavy Fire* was written by Ted, the guy on the team who had a spare lunch break and once saw the trailer for *Blackhawk Down*. It's difficult to fight the face-palm reflex when the mid-mission narrator says that, despite all his "war training", this next mission had "trucks in flame" and was "hard for a combat". Much like your comrades, this storyteller delivers his lines with all the power and conviction of a Speak 'n' Spell running out of batteries. And it's simply impossible to stay immersed when a soldier shrieks out "aaaargh", but pronounces it "arge". Unfortunately you can't tweak the volume options and replace these people with the sound of sweet gunfire. There are two kids in a schoolyard somewhere, right now, making more believable battlefield SFX than these using only their mouths and onomatopoeia.

It's fitting that developers are called Mastiff, because this game looks like a dog's breakfast. Each mission is a waterlogged shamle through the land that time and PS2 forgot, where you'll have to re-kill the same six simpletons over and over. The closest this ever gets to being difficult is when baddies are deliberately hidden behind either your onscreen gun (genius!), or the sort of lens flare moles see when they're freed from the Matrix.

Speaking of inelegant rorts, you'll just love the motion-based moments programmed in by Steve (filling in for Mike, filling in for Phil who had to get the cat done). Most of these quick-time events are a joke as there's no consequence for ignoring them. That said, our years of experience failed us when we were asked to flick the Move 'up' to scale a ladder, you see. Only when we hurled our Move away in disgust did we realise that, for the last ten minutes, the game wanted a 'right' flick.

Marvellous.

Honestly, we can't imagine who to recommend this to. Obviously not a hardcore gamer. But certainly not a child too young for a *Call of Duty* as the narrator's tale reeks of recruitment tool (he wanted to be a Marine since he was seven and "refused to listen to anybody who said it was a bad idea", apparently). Don't let the bitchin' cover art and the bullshots on the back fool you, *Heavy Fire* deserves all the flak it'll get, and more.

Adam Mathew

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** Drab, uninspired and chock full of repeated elements. An eyesore, quite frankly.

**SOUND** Horrendous. Voice actors sound like they don't want to be there and sound effects are pissweak.

**CONTROLS** Controller play is sluggish and ill-advised. Move and the cover system feel awkward and the icons are often wrong.

**REPLAY VALUE** Beat the first 12 missions and you can play them again during a darker time of day. Woo. Multiplayer is a non-event.

## Verdict

A me-too cash grab that is ludicrously overpriced and under-fun.

3

## Play this if you like

Warfare so bad it'll give you Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** ON RAILS

**RELEASE:** FEBRUARY

**DISTRIBUTOR:** AIE

**DEVELOPER:** MASTIFF

**PLAYERS:** 1-4

**PRICE:** \$89.95



# Jane's Advanced Strike Fighters

Plane bailing

**Play this if you like**

*Ace Combat*

**Info**

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** FLIGHT

**RELEASE:** FEBRUARY 2012

**DISTRIBUTOR:** QV

**SOFTWARE**

**DEVELOPER:**

TRICKSTAR GAMES

**PLAYERS:** 1-16

**RRP:** \$89.95

The Jane's brand of flight sims were originally made for PC between 1994 and 2002, and published by EA. There's a stack of them, and from what we can tell they were once revered as they featured once-intricate detail for the hardcore PC flight-sim market, then turned too crap and were out-classed by more realistic and fun titles.

*Jane's Advanced Strike Fighters* continues this undesirable reputation. You're given 30 modern aircraft to fly over the fictional country of Azbaristan in 16 shortish missions, helping the oil-rich South side of the country eliminate a threat by the North. You play as an American

pilot, whose country offers assistance to the South in exchange for oil. This information is fed to you by reams of text at the start, and by an Azbaristan General whose long-winded explanations of the fight against the 'dogs' in the North during missions are a contrived way of revealing the story.

If you took *J.A.S.F.* at face value – ugly, short and unengaging – without looking at other games around it, it'd be a sad indication of the flight game market. The mission structure's barely changed from titles of the early '90s, as you bomb spawning ground targets, avoiding SAMs and AA guns, while hammering the afterburners to cover a lot of ground between yourself and the air targets. Although each plane's stats are presented at the start of each mission they all feel pretty similar as they clip through the air and over the environment that pops up at will. The biggest crime *J.A.S.F.* commits is loading mid-mission to a cut scene, then dumping a host of brand new targets in your radar that couldn't have possibly made it there in that time frame.

From the first mission to the last, *J.A.S.F.* is left to rot by the arcadey and capable *Ace Combat* for sheer thrills, embarrassed by the variety of missions offered in *H.A.W.X. 2*, and technically outperformed by the more serious *IL-2 Sturmovik*. **Paul Taylor**



This vehicle, like the game it appears in, bombs and crashes

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** Pretty rough all round. After the text-heavy intro you'll enjoy a bit of pop-up and slow-to-load textures

**SOUND** Weak voice acting and limp sound effects. Ho hum.

**CONTROLS** Sluggish. Everything feels a bit vague.

**REPLAY VALUE** Close to nil. The back of the box promises 16-player multi – good luck.

## Verdict

A poor effort. All the great flight-sim moments have been done elsewhere, and to better effect too.

5

# Sonic CD

Ring a ding

**Play this if you like**

*Sonic 2*

**Info**

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** PLATFORMER

**RELEASE:** NOW

**DISTRIBUTOR:** SEGA

**DEVELOPER:** SEGA

**PLAYERS:** 1

**RRP:** \$6.25

Heard of *Sonic CD* but not really sure what it is? You're not alone. Canonically set between *Sonic 3* and *Sonic 4: Episode 1*, *Sonic CD* was developed for the under-loved Mega CD, the add-on to the Sega Mega Drive. Each new platform needs a recognisable title to snare sales, and *Sonic CD* was it.

That's the history lesson. The good news? *Sonic CD* feels like Sonic of old. Although *Sonic Generations* is by far and away the best Sonic game in a long time (seriously, it's pretty good despite tailing off in the final levels) there's nothing quite like Sonic from the early 90s, and *Sonic CD* is that.

The interesting mechanic here is that Sonic can go back and forth in time. Spin a sign mid-level to the past or the future, get Sonic up to top speed and hold him there, and he'll slap Einstein

in the face, breaking the space/time continuum.

Jumping around in time alters the level quite dramatically beyond a simple sprite change. The whole layout's altered and rings that were previously wedged on top of bits of scenery are now yours to find and collect. There's some guff about a good future and a bad one, and mistakes in the past have to be corrected. Muck up in the past and you'll only see a bad future, so there's a strategic element to consider.

Pity then that this is the meanest *Sonic* game ever. Springs will punt you into spikes, the layout works against you as it's hard to get the blue fella up to speed, and the 3D special stage (a rip-off of classic SNES game *F-Zero*) is tripe. Bummer. Sonic himself feels well balanced here, and we bet Sega make a few sales from people who want that good ol' Sonic in a relatively fresh (for them) adventure. It is dirt cheap, though. **Paul Taylor**



HARDFAX: Tails is a useless mutated fox and we never liked him



Don't make Robotnik run he's full of chocolate and failure

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** 16-bit graphics tweaked through a few nice filters. Go old school, though.

**SOUND** You can have both the Japanese and Western soundtrack. Classic effects.

**CONTROLS** Perfect when you're up to speed, but Sonic's never been great at precise jumps.

**REPLAY VALUE** It'll take a lot of practise to be skillful at this.

## Verdict

The level design will make you spew a bit, but if you've the patience Sonic feels great and pure again.

6



# Trine 2

With our powers combined we aren't Captain Planet!

**Play this if you like**

*Trine*

**Info**

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** PLATFORMER

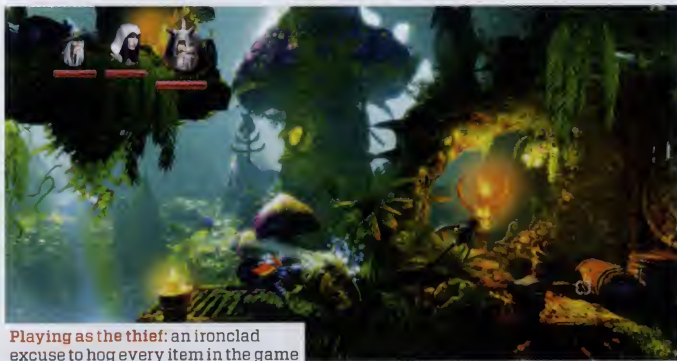
**RELEASE:** OUT NOW

**DISTRIBUTOR:** TBA

**DEVELOPER:** FROZENBYTE

**PLAYERS:** 1-3

**PRICE:** TBA



Playing as the thief: an ironclad excuse to hog every item in the game

When the office bogan shambled over and pronounced this game "tryin' to" the witless git summed up Frozenbyte's whole game plan. *Trine 2* is a sequel that desperately wants to be better than the original template, and we'll be damned if it doesn't achieve just that.

The crux of the game is that it's a three-player platformer that lets you play the iconic roles of wizard, thief and knight, with each hero having an intuitive, unique set of powers. The thief is a ranged fighter with a grapple hook; the knight has a shield and a hammer for belting through walls, and the wizard can summon objects to aid traversal, plus he has a bad-arse beard. Much like the *Lego* series, in co-op you and a mate must step up to solve



Foolish mammoth. We smote his ruin upon the mountainside

problems with your respective abilities, in single-player you can morph into whichever character you need.

Co-op is definitely the way to go here. While you don't need other players to solve the many physics-based puzzles, having two local or online buddies means you can team up your skills to make emergent fun. We had a blast raining arrows down as we were being levitated by a wizard – a feat that would've been impossible without a knight protecting not-Gandalf from goblins. There's even an unlimited mode where everybody can be anybody at once.

*Trine 2* has been lovingly produced. It has eye-gogglingly gorgeous 2D visuals, a well produced renaissance fair soundtrack, the sort of quaint fairytale story for any age and a conservative play will take a decent 5-6 hours.

But the best thing about *Trine 2* is how deliberately exploitable the physics system is. Rather than have one answer to a puzzle we got endorphins from making up our own answer. That's a rare feeling to be found in any game, but it's just another day at work for this magical platformer. Conjure up some cash and be spellbound today. **A Adam Mathew**

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** Achingly beautiful in places. Vibrant backgrounds positively crawling with detail.

**SOUND** Stirring soundtrack and decent sound effects.

**CONTROLS** Tight, responsive. They work well with the open-ended physics system.

**REPLAY VALUE** There are experience orbs to nab in single-player. Co-op could feasibly be replayed a few times.

## Verdict

A genuine improvement on an already solid platformer.

**8**

# Deadliest Warrior: Ancient Combat

Hack to the future

**Play this if you like**

*Bushido Blade, SoulCalibur series*

**Info**

**FORMAT:** PS3

**GENRE:** FIGHTING

**RELEASE:** FEBRUARY

**DISTRIBUTOR:** TBA

**DEVELOPER:** 345 GAMES

**PLAYERS:** 1-2

**PRICE:** TBA



"Suddenly, I'm not half the man I used to be..."

We don't know about you, but we just love it when history comes alive with death. This is exactly what happens in *Deadliest Warrior: Ancient Combat*, a game based on the successful American TV series. Truth be told, this is actually a disc-based corraling of the two *Deadliest Warriors* PSN titles (*DW: The Game* and *DW: Legends*), both of which we never saw on our Aussie PSN. God knows why, too. They're halfway decent and worth a stab.

Before we begin, an introduction for those who refuse to pay for TV: *Deadliest Warrior* is a time-retarding "what if" that pits two of the most feared warriors civilisation has ever

known against one another. As a result, *The Game* offers weapons-based brawls between centurions, knights, ninja, pirates, samurai, Spartans, Vikings and Apaches (the Indians, not the choppers, unfortunately). *Legend* does things differently by grouping historical hard-cases into classes such as, Hannibal and Alexander the Great (heavily armoured and sluggish); Shaka Zulu and Sun Tzu (speedy but low armour); and psychotic berserkers like William Wallace (lots of offensive power and the ability to resist crying, even when his intestines are being pulled out).

Both games have a dedication to dismemberment and a surprising emphasis on defensive stratagems. *Legends* is the pick of the duo as it expands upon *The Game*'s basic, casual-focused combos a bit more – but it still isn't *SoulCalibur* by any stretch of the imagination. It lets you feint attack, push (people into bottomless pits), or grab your enemy to start a rock-scissors-paper game of wounding.

Not since *Bushido Blade* have we played a fighting game as tense as these two titles, as any bout can be over in one bloody second. This certainly isn't the deepest fighter around, nor the prettiest, or the longest. But it's cheap as chips, offers a tonne of weapons to unlock and there's simply no denying how instantly gratifying and strangely addictive two-player mode is. This is a cut below the rest but still worth a look. **A Adam Mathew**

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** Surprisingly serviceable and bloodier than a blind butcher's school. Faces look like mannequins though.

**SOUND** Not spectacular, but not earmuff-inducing. The warriors get into their battle roars quite a bit.

**CONTROLS** The auto-aiming for projectile weapons is unreliable, but the hand-to-hand is fairly sound.

**REPLAY VALUE** Weapons and modes to unlock. Zombies and Generals mode keep single-player interesting for a while. Multi rocks.

## Verdict

Easily worth parting with some spare change for a laugh. Just don't expect much.

**6**



# Just Dance 3

Also includes embarrassment



Play this if you like

SingStar

## Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: MUSIC

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

DEVELOPER: UBISOFT

PARIS

PLAYERS: 1-4

RRP: \$69.95

We don't normally check out games like this, despite a local Ubisoft rep assuring us that *Just Dance* is the biggest dance game series in the world (we've taken our pinch of salt thankyouverymuch). Dance games, rightly or wrongly, seem like casual fluff that you wouldn't think would be capable of being an engaging title. **WRONG.**

*Just Dance 3* is hardcore, man. It demands a lot from you and of you (not including you possessing Move controllers), as you try to keep up with the choreography on screen by following the stick-figures at the bottom of the screen that give you an indication of what's coming up and



Skipping the light fantastic

simultaneously mirroring the ludicrously coloured avatar. Any shred of inhibition you possess needs to be discarded immediately – it helps if you're a girl on the cusp of being a teenager with all your mates around, or you're alone so no-one can see you flail about.

Ubisoft have included a cunning tracklist that includes more than 50 songs. Sure, there's hopeless pop with Duck Sauce's Barbra Streisand, Mika's Lollipop and a few Katy Perry hits, but also iconic tracks like KISS' 'I Was Made For Lovin' You', The Chemical Brothers' 'Hey Boy Hey Girl' and Daft Punk's 'Da Funk'. You see what they did there? They just made it relevant for everybody.

You wouldn't play this on your own. It's not quite the new *SingStar* or *Guitar Hero*, but it is good simple fun. You can even cheat a bit, like we did, by only moving your hand that grasps the Move controller. Do that, though, and you're cheating yourself. **Paul Taylor**

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** Bright, colourful, simple. You'll barely notice the on-the-fly feedback as you concentrate on your performance.

**SOUND** Good selection of tracks that's skewed towards a younger market with a clutch of old hits.

**CONTROLS** Responsive Move controls, though our cursor started to drift after an hour of enthusiastic shaking.

**REPLAY VALUE** It's going to take a lot of time to hit a perfect score, and there are a few modes to unlock too. Plus, Karaoke mode.

## Verdict

More fun than you'd expect if you can discard your inhibitions, and it's technically solid as well.

8

# Happy Feet Two: The Videogame

Blame it on the boogie

Play this if you like

Traveller's Tales Lego series

## Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: PLATFORMER

RELEASE: OUT NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: WARNER BROS.

DEVELOPER: KMM GAMES

PLAYERS: 1-2

PRICE: \$69.95

We love that this game was developed by Kennedy Miller Mitchell Games; they're Sydney-based and George Miller made *Mad Max II*. We also love that it features penguins; Mother Nature gave them tuxedo T-Shirts that say "I want to be formal, but I'm here to party too" and they secretly do interpretive ice dances of their life's journey. We do not, however, love *Happy Feet Two*.

We only like it, but that's a massive step up from the hate we felt towards the *Dance Dance Revolution* wannabe that was its predecessor. Two tasks you (or you and a younger sibling) to take control of Mumble and Ramon in a platforming odyssey sprinkled with mini-games from a wide variety of genres. The bulk of your time is spent recruiting more penguins to unlock

traversal opportunities, combining your hero penguins' unique skills to reach new areas and you must also evade predators in ice slides. As always, you'll bust out some spontaneous button-based boogie, too.

It's simplistic fun that's obviously at its best with another player, but much like our experiences with similar co-op titles, the differently-sized characters can cause hassles. Mumble is easy to see, the smaller Ramon is frequently lost in your black and white posse who – and this is a racial statement against penguins – all look the same.

*Happy Feet Two* may not be as broadly appealing as its Lego co-op competition, but is a decent kid's movie tie-in. Certainly much better than the first game, as KMM's attachment to the IP shows. This is a snap for older gamers to beat, but the 50 odd levels increase in complexity and switches play-styles often enough – from platforming to dancing to third-person racing – to keep younger players enthralled. Don't clear your dance card for this, but certainly wiggle it in if your budget allows. **Adam Mathew**



"What shall we sing, guys?" I Believe I Can Fly! Way to kill the buzz, Frank"



"Hey you, penger-win. Get in mah bell-eh"

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** KMM try to spice it up, but the iceberg boredom sets in quick.

**SOUND** Salsa tunes are always rad. Even still, some of the bare-bones, looped level beats outstay their welcome quickly.

**CONTROLS** Ramon is a bit too sluggish and Move support would've been nice, otherwise pretty decent.

**REPLAY VALUE** Hundred percenting this will take a respectable amount of time. Great co-op action for kids.

## Verdict

Simple but effective. Not good, but not terrible either.

6





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**singstar**

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**PlayStation®Move  
REQUIRED**

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NEED  
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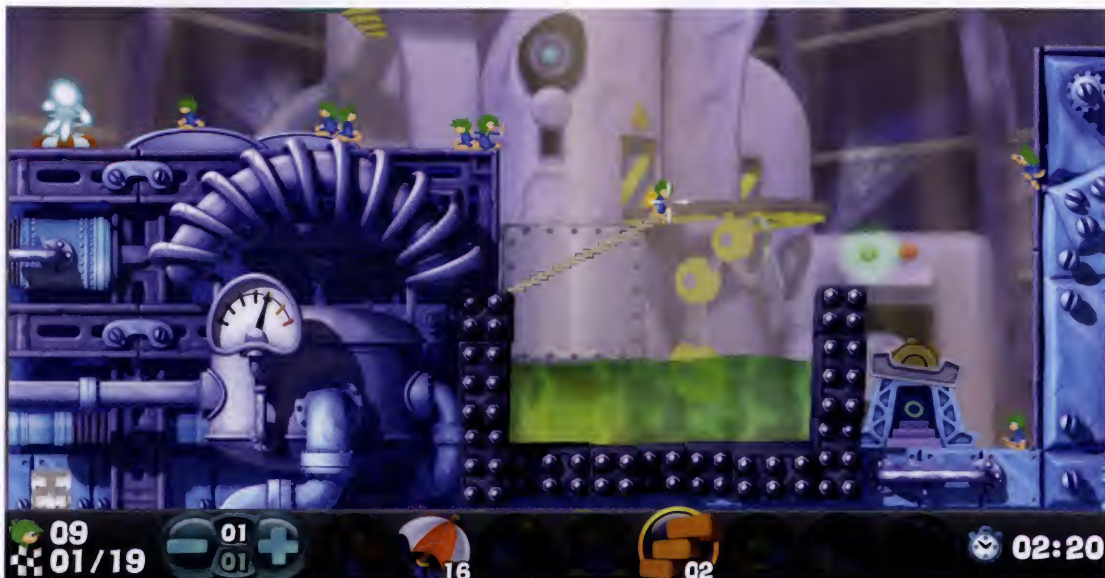
**PS3**

PlayStation-3

**SONY**  
make.believe

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**Play this if you like**

*Tetris, Jenga, echochrome*

## Info

**FORMAT:** PS3  
**GENRE:** PARTY  
**RELEASE:** TBA  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** SCEE  
**DEVELOPER:** VARIOUS  
**PLAYERS:** 1  
**RRP:** \$TBA

## Final Say

**PRESENTATION** Each is simple in its own way, but they're all smooth

**SOUND** The 'Oh no!' of exploding lemmings still raises a smile.

**CONTROLS** Ranges from intuitive (echochrome ii) to tasking (Lemmings) to scream inducing (Tumble).

**REPLAY VALUE** There's plenty of life in echochrome ii's stage building mode.

## Verdict

**This is a reasonable Move compilation. All three games you get here are available to download on the PSN, though.**

**7**

# Move Mind Benders

A trio of challenges

**M**ove Mindbenders is three PSN titles compiled onto one Blu-ray: *Lemmings*, *echochrome ii* and *Tumble*. If you've downloaded them already there's no reason for you to get this. Plus, as we were going to print, we were told the disc isn't going to be released in Australia, so the PSN (or asking someone in the UK to send it to you) is your only option.

*Lemmings* needs no introduction, except that this is the first time the green-haired chumps have starred in a Move title. It's the same title that was released roughly five years ago, and Move support has been patched in for the PSN game. The concept is basically the same since the game was first released way back

in 1991, except the skills you need to guide the lemmings to the exit are dotted around the stage. Move feels like a more natural way to control them (it's as close to a mouse you're going to get), except that the crosshair sometimes drifts and gets a touch squirrely. Not ideal for pixel-perfect execution.

The hugely original puzzler *echochrome ii* is a standout and is a true sequel to the PSP title. The Move controller acts as a torch that cast shadows on walls, and in between you and the backdrop is a series of disconnected blocks of varying shapes. Shine the light on the blocks and make a stage out of the shadows for your character to walk across.

He moves on his own accord, unable

to jump or fall unless there's a specifically created hole in the scenery, and you'll often have to move the stage around on the fly, creating the goal doorway out of a sphere and vertical block. By the time you get to the last few stages logical reasoning is junked in favour of waving the torch around like a bored six-year-old to figure out how where the exit should be.

*Tumble* will set your nerves on edge as you try to build a tower of various blocks and barrels. Sometimes you're going for a height challenge, or directing lasers to a certain point. It's more fiddly than gratifying at times, feeling like a diversion than a fleshed-out title. The backgrounds match the sterile environment in this lacklustre puzzler. **Paul Taylor**



## EyePet Adventures

**FORMAT:** PSP **GENRE:** PARTY **RELEASE:** NOW  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** SCEE **DEVELOPER:** SCEE **PLAYERS:** 1  
**RRP:** \$49.95

Sony's own augmented reality cat/chimp leaves the confines of your (child's) living room, and embarks on a series of, er, adventures. You'll need a Go!Cam camera attachment for your PSP to use the AR card included with the game.

Fun-wise, there's the submarine you'll use to search for hidden treasure in labyrinthine caverns, unlocking various toys and mini-games before dressing up the virtual beast. Just keep the card in view and anyone under 10 will have fun with this.

**Verdict** Suited to its intended audience of children. Make sure you have an uncluttered flat surface.

**6**



## Winter Stars

**FORMAT:** PS3 **GENRE:** SPORTS **RELEASE:** NOW  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** QV SOFTWARE **DEVELOPER:** DEEP SILVER **PLAYERS:** 1-4 **RRP:** \$TBA

A quick heads-up: you'll need Move controls to play this collection of winter sports games that are strung together by a loose narrative.

Kudos to the devs for deciding to put a little thought behind how they were going to present this rather than lob a bunch of games at you, but it suffers from pointless waggle in places, and also scrappy execution in others.

It's a pleasing spread of sports on offer, including biathlon where you ski and shoot at the same time.

**Verdict** Not great, but not bad. One of the better Move sports games though the dialogue will grate.

**6**



## Invizimals: The Lost Tribes

**FORMAT:** PSP **GENRE:** ACTION-ADVENTURE  
**RELEASE:** NOW **DISTRIBUTOR:** SCEE **DEVELOPER:** NOVARAMA **PLAYERS:** 1 **RRP:** \$49.95

Ever played Invizimals? Did you (or your offspring) like it? You're going to like this too. For anyone new, the augmented reality formula hasn't changed much since the last game, where you need to hunt down your band of creatures (a touch like the infamous Pokemon) and then pit them against other players.

With 150 creatures to find (the most in an Invizimals title) you're going to spend a good amount of time discovering them all, and when you do it's best played with another human opponent.

**Verdict** Good fun for younger audiences that'll require a bit of physical interaction on their part.

**7**



# MOVE INTO ANOTHER WORLD

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[playstation-move.com](http://playstation-move.com)

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PS3

PlayStation 3



### WHAT'S NEW

## PSN DEVELOPMENTS

What you can expect to see and play on the PSN

Ubisoft's great god game/puzzler *From Dust* has done the publisher proud, selling half a million copies across all platforms since its release last year. They're pretty happy with the result, telling mcvuk.com that the decision to sell the title exclusively online attributed to the sales figures.

"There is less risk releasing a new game digitally," said Ubisoft's Thomas Paincon. "At retail, if you don't have a 90 Metacritic score and millions of fans, it's very risky to launch a new game."

It's a theory that Vector Cell, developers of *Amy*, will keep in mind. *Amy* is a survival horror title where a young woman called Lana has to protect a young, seemingly defenceless girl called Amy, as suddenly-infected humans have turned murderous. The game is aiming to go back to the roots of survival horror by making combat the last resort in a world populated by other desperate survivors, mutated freaks and the military. You'll need to be sneaky to stay alive, as melee weapons break after too much rough play, though Amy has some mysterious powers of her own.

*Gran Turismo 5* has been bolstered by more content after being updated to version 2.0, and update 2.02 hit late last month. The second DLC car pack, the ingeniously titled Car Pack 2, contains the 2012 Nissan GT-R Black edition R35, the Mini Cooper S, a 2010 Volkswagen Golf VI R, and a Volkswagen Scirocco R. We don't have the local price at time of going to print, but we'll estimate it'll be less than \$8.

The 2.02 update brings a bunch of tweaks to the technical side of the game, and crucially also gifts the new Toyota/



Funny, the forecast said nothing about Mighty Sand Balls

Subaru car, the Toyota 86, for zero dollars. You'll also get 10 coupons to wash your virtual car, change its virtual oil, overhaul the digital engine or put the sprites back into their original configuration in GT Auto.

Finally, grab your smartphone and a QR code reader, or point your browser to the URLs below the QR codes. They're simply ads for the PSN Video Store, but they were shot in one take and show off an effect called immersive imaging. Check 'em out!



**Most Insane Immersive Movie Experience EVER**  
<http://goo.gl/9pCxH>



**Most Insane Immersive Movie Experience EVER, Part 2**  
<http://goo.gl/6wWno>



**Most Insane Immersive Movie Experience EVER, Part 3**  
<http://goo.gl/pasIS>



**Behind the scenes**  
<http://goo.gl/Fsu5G>



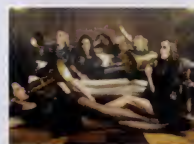
## VIDZONE PLAYLIST SPOTLIGHT

THIS MONTH: Most Popular Alternative



### GOTYE - SOMEBODY THAT I USED TO KNOW

Gotye and Kimbra sing a lilting duet that was one of the most popular last year. Possibly helped by partial nudity.



### CALL IT WHAT YOU WANT - FOSTER THE PEOPLE

This year's MGMT act like brats in an upbeat crowd pleaser. Would go off live.



### OK GO - HERE IT GOES AGAIN

Four blokes choreograph a truly memorable routine using treadmills. Old, sure, but it's still brilliant.

VidZone is the largest online music video VOD service in the world, and it's available **free** on PS3. Download the vidzone application and you'll have access to over 13,000 music videos at the push of a button!



## PlayStation®Network

## ESSENTIAL DOWNLOADS



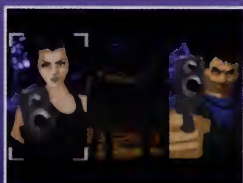
### LITTLEBIGPLANET 2 - THE MUPPETS COSTUME KIT 2

Miss Piggy, Gonzo, Statler and Waldorf, all for \$8.30. Now you'll be able to tell the latter two apart.



### MORTAL KOMBAT ARCADE KOLLECTION

MK, MK II and UMK3 in one download for \$14.45. Take on the world for kred (sorry).



### FEAR EFFECT

This PSone title finally hits. With a ripping art style it's a cult classic, where a trio of mercenaries are trying to find a missing girl. More old-school than you probably remember.



### FAR CRY 2

It's a little old and a little flawed, but we still hold this hooter close to our hearts. Traverse a hostile African landscape as you hunt for The Jackal, a murderous arms dealer. Gripping stuff.



### JUST CAUSE 2 ULTIMATE BUNDLE

For \$49.95 you get one of the very best open world action games and all of the chaos-causing DLC. The DLC is a sweet treat on top of the cream.



# WHAT IS PSN?

The PlayStation Network (PSN) is free to join and free to play. No subscription is required to play online. You'll be able to communicate with friends, access the PlayStation Store and download demos, add-ons, trailers, PSN games, PSone classics and blockbuster movies!



## PlayStation®Network

### TROPHY LIVES

You love games so much you may as well be hitched to them. Here's what you did to get your beloved trophies.



**Sam Bussing**

**Game:** *LittleBigPlanet*

**Trophy:** Booty Master

Yeah, it's old, but I got a massive sense of satisfaction after finding all those sneaky prize bubbles!



**Joel Meekings**

**Game:** *Modern Warfare 3*

**Trophy:** Scout Leader

I embarked on this journey to collect all 46 intel without any guides. I'm quite proud of myself that I did that!



**Jeremy Ashe Szal**

**Game:** *Final Fantasy XIII*

**Trophy:** Treasure Hunter

I'm still finding old coffee mugs and Redbull cans scattered in my lounge room after this epic effort.



"Says here 'point away from face.' Seems sensible."

**GENRE:** SHOOTER **RELEASE:** NOW **DISTRIBUTOR:** EA **DEVELOPER:** DICE **PLAYERS:** 2 - 24 **RRP:** \$23.95

### DLC >

## Battlefield 3 – Back to Karkand

### Making the old stuff look new again

It shouldn't work. The *Back to Karkand* pack is four old maps from *Battlefield* history, remade and tweaked to become new ones. The *Modern Warfare* crowd go a bit nuts about this type of assumed wallet gouging, but considering that no-one's forcing you to buy it, and the fact that *CoD* has made more money than any other game series before it, then it's an approach that evidently works.

And so, the package. If you bought the special edition of *Battlefield 3* then there's no reason why you shouldn't have *Back to Karkand* on your hard drive. It's free for you, and we suspect you're already loving it.

For everyone else who's considering whether to shell out for it (and you've been sitting on the fence since it came

out a month ago) then you need to know what you're missing out on. In simple terms, ready your wallet.

One thing we (or the *MW3* fanbase) didn't take into consideration above is that the level of destructibility offered in *Battlefield 3*. The four maps here – Gulf of Oman, Sharqi Peninsula and Wake Island and the pinnacle of the bunch, Strike at Karkand – are some of the best ever created in the *Battlefield* series (while some may say ever in the shooter genre), so the mix of nostalgia, genuinely great design and the destructive power of the Frostbite 2 engine means that you're bound to have a lot fun.

There's new vehicles, too, including a jet, buggy and an APC, though they're relatively bested by existing hardware.

There's also a new mode (that long-time *Battlefield* fans will have seen before), Conquest Assault that's more filler than killer. But you'll really want to get your hands on the new weaponry, and you'll have to work for them, either through teamwork or sheer determination depending on the conditions to unlock them. Grumble if you like about not having the stuff you handed over cash for immediately, but exploring the maps and experimenting with what you have makes the experience feel more rounded and fulfilling. A terrific pack for the asking price.

### VERDICT

Yes. An exciting and worthwhile pack to add to your collection. Can we have more like this, please?



## PlayStation®Network

## BEST GAMES TO PLAY ONLINE



### CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 3

**DEVELOPER:** INFINITY WARD/  
SLEDGEHAMMER GAMES

**PLAYERS:** 1-16

Take *MW2* and add in some insanely addictive contracts and inventive modes in the multiplayer proper. Solid shooter fun.



### DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO

**DEVELOPER:** REFLECTIONS

**PLAYERS:** 2-8

Excellent. You'll spend most amount of your time playing Tag and Trailblazer, and while it sounds slim it's indescribably addictive. Believe us when we say it's worth it just for this alone.



### SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV

**DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM

**PLAYERS:** 1-4

It's like being in the arcades (remember those?) when you had a bunch of lads and lasses hanging around, marvelling at your quarter-circle technique. Champagne gaming.



### FIFA 12

**DEVELOPER:** EA SPORTS

**PLAYERS:** 1-22

Shooters aren't the only games that need explicit tactics, and the beautiful game is remarkably brilliant with 11 versus 11 matches. It's still as compelling and smooth as last year's effort. Get on it right now.



### BATTLEFIELD 3

**DEVELOPER:** DICE

**PLAYERS:** 1-24

You'll be won over by the chaotic destruction and storming in to an enemy base on the back of a quad bike. You'll stay for the tactics. Team matches have little room for lone wolves, so play friendly or don't play at all.



## ► DRAGONSLAYER'S DAY OFF

# The best ways to dick about as a Dovahkiin

*Skyrim* has been out for some time now, long enough for many of you to make a sizeable dent in its (reported) 300 hours worth of quests. That's all well and good, but if you want a break from fetching crap and slogging across snow, we've got just the activities for you.

### 1 ► Strip down, nude up

Clothes are a hinderance, man. So don't let the fact that it's snowing out dissuade you in any way from getting your nuddy on. Though we can't hope to match the full nudity modding of our PC gaming brethren, kicking about in your medieval grundies has just as much potential for hilarity. Things to do in your Y-fronts: sit in the king's throne, jump – but not quite get over – people sitting on benches and you're not a hero until you've slain a dragon without pants on.



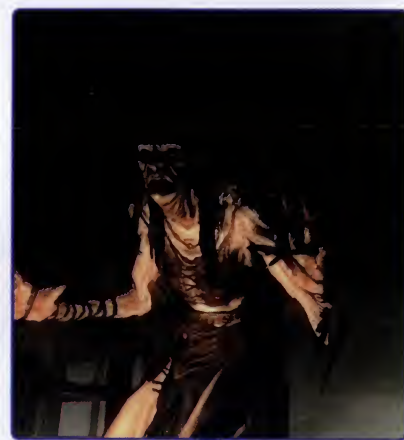
### 2 ► Get your Wabbajack on

After a crazed meeting with everyone's favourite daedric prince of madness, Sheogorath, the crazy old coot will ask you to do three very interesting little tasks and thus, you'll score the Wabbajack. This random effect weapon may turn the residents of *Skyrim* into mudcrabs, rabbits, dremora – even money – or just flat out disintegrate them. Such a shame this thing doesn't work on dragons.



### 3 ► Get hitched like a bitch

Find an Amulet of Mara, stalk the right person and build up enough brownie points, and you'll be given the dialogue option to ask "if they're interested". They are, of course – who the hell wouldn't be? You can then tie the knot and have a sacred union much like real-life (i.e. you'll lock them in your house and ignore them for 300 hours straight, or make them follow you as a beast of burden). Ain't love grand?



### 4 ► Get a head in the world

Max out your one-handed skills (and keep your mind out of the gutter) and you can be enjoying a decapitation perk. Unlock said mystical ability and any standing power attack you do has a 25% chance of de-meloning your foe. Better yet, you can then collect heads and position them in amusing positions about your house. No sir, nothing creepy about that. Good clean and wholesome gaming right there.

### 5 ► Live the Twilight dream

Bugger the sparkly sissy vampires that are in vogue nowadays, *Skyrim* let's you vamp it up oldschool. At the fourth stage of vampirism, you will become 100% resistant to ice, have a 100% weakness to fire, but all of your stats will be lowered by 60 points in sunlight. Some of us in the office view this state as an interesting challenge, others think vampires suck balls more than they do necks.





## 6 ► Unleash the Beast

Do enough Companions guild quests and you can become a werewolf. Beast Form grants you double the stamina and health, more attack power, no bounty for your actions, sprint speed faster than a horse and, presumably, you have an irresistible urge to take your shirt off. All the damn time. The downside? You can only transform once daily for two minutes (pro tip: eat people to extend that), silver weapons do twice the damage to you and you can't access menus. It's also worth noting that you can only be a werewolf or a vampire, not both. Choose wisely.



## 7 ► Kick off a riot

*Skyrim*, for the most part, is a game that takes itself very seriously. So much so, many of us buy into all that majesty and forget the fact that this is just another open-world to exploit for our own amusement. Indulge your mischievous side! Save the game and treat this place like many of us did *Liberty City* in *GTA III*. See how many towns you can raze before you're inevitably cut down like a mad dog.



## 8 ► Robin in the 'hood

Being a crackshot with a bow is obviously made immeasurably easier when you have the bullet-time inducing perk as well as the zoom aiming perk. Unlock those two and go test the limits of your skill. Start off by shooting birds down on the wing. Step it up a notch (see what we did there?) by taking down butterflies from twenty paces. Or place an apple on a stationary townsman for a bit of William Tell action.



## 9 ► Interior decorating jerk

Here's something that took us way too long to figure out: holding in  $\otimes$  on any object in the game will free-drag it around, not plonk it straight into your inventory (and make you look like a thief). Using this technique you can position objects anywhere you want with bugged all repercussions. The best thing to do is place buckets on the heads of NPCs to break their line of sight as you pilfer their goods. Or you could intricately place a fish on that innkeeper's head. Lastly, make a pile of his worldly possessions, Fus Ro Dah the shit out of them and see what sticks where.



## 10 ► Invent base jumping for somebody

What's good for inanimate objects is good for people, too. First, entice a follower to climb the Seven Thousand Steps up to High Hrothgar, the tallest peak in Tamriel. Second, breathe in a triple-inhaled Unrelenting Force shout and blast their ass off the mountain. You could even pitch yourself off after them and try to start an, admittedly awkward, conversation on the way down. "So, what are you doing after this?"





## ► THE ELDER SCROLLS V: SKYRIM

# Shouts about

The main quest in *Skyrim* is good enough to 'shout' you a few free dragon words – but what others are there to be found? Here's our comprehensive guide to what they do and the three locations that you'll need to trek to in order to power them up threefold.



### ANIMAL ALLEGIANCE

Sic wild beasts on people

- Angarvunde (The Rift) **I8**
- Ancient's Ascent (Falkreath Hold) **F8**
- Ysgoram's Tomb (Winterhold) **I1**

### AURA WHISPER

Reveal life forces around you

- Northwind Summit (The Rift) **K6**
- Valthume (The Reach) **C5**
- Volunruud (The Pale) **G4**

### BECOME ETHEREAL

Untouchable ghost action

- Ironbind Barrow (Winterhold) **H3**
- Lost Valley Redoubt (The Reach) **D5**
- Ustengrav (Hjaalmarch): The Horn of Jurgen Windcaller **F2**

### CALL DRAGON

Phone a frienemy

You learn this shout during the Main Quest.

### CALL OF VALOR

Call three hero homies

You'll learn this shout right at the end of the Main Quest.

### CLEAR SKIES

Weatherman extraordinaire

• You learn this shout during the Main Quest.

### DISARM

Yyyoink! That sword's mine!

- Eldersblood Peak (Hjaalmarch) **E3**
- Silverdrift Lair (The Pale) **H3**
- Snow Veil Sanctum (Winterhold) **K3**

### DISMAYING SHOUT

Make your foes crap themselves

- Dead Crone Rock (The Reach) **A5**
- Labyrinthian (Hjaalmarch) **F4**
- Lost Tongue Overlook (The Rift) **K8**

### DRAGONREND

Air clearance: denied

You learn this during the main quest

### ELEMENTAL FURY

Swing faster and strike harder

- Dragontooth Crater (The Reach) **B3**
- Killreath Ruins (Haafingar) **C2**
- Shriekwind Bastion (Falkreath Hold) **F7**





### FIRE BREATH

Great for melting ice dragons and vampires

- Dustman's Cairn (Whiterun) **F4**
- Sunderstone Gorge (Falkreath Hold) **E6**
- Throat of the World (Whiterun) **H5**

### FROST BREATH

Tell your enemies to chill out

- Bonestrewn Crest (Eastmarch) **J5**
- Folgunthur (Hjaalmarch) **E2**
- Skyborn Altar (Hjaalmarch) **F3**

### ICE FORM

Crowd control freeze ability

- Frostmere Crypt (The Pale) **G3**
- Mount Anthor (Winterhold) **I3**
- Saarthal (Winterhold) **I2**

### KYNE'S PEACE

Stop animals from chewing you

- Ragnvald (The Reach) **A4**
- Rannveig's Fast (Whiterun Hold) **E4**
- Shroud Hearth Barrow (The Rift) **I6**



### MARKED FOR DEATH

Weaken enemy life and armour

- Autumnwatch Tower (The Rift) **I7**
- Dark Brotherhood Sanctuary (Falkreath Hold) **E7**
- Forsaken Cave (The Pale) **I3**

### SLOW TIME

Make time your bitch

- Hag's End (The Reach) **B2**
- Korvanjund (The Pale) **H4**
- Labyrinthian (Hjaalmarch) **F4**

### STORM CALL

Lightning bolts to the face

- Forelhost (The Rift) **L8**
- High Gate Ruins (The Pale) **F2**
- Skuldafn (Other Realm): The World-Eater's Eyrie

### THROW VOICE

Ventriloquist misdirection

- All three words are found at Shearpoint (The Pale) **H4**

### UNRELENTING FORCE

Force push for non-Jedi

This is the learned in the main quest

### WHIRLWIND SPRINT

Ninja speed burst

Found in the main quest



## ▶ MUST WATCH

# Boardwalk Empire

(MA15+)

**DIRECTOR:** VARIOUS **STARRING:** STEVE BUSCEMI, MICHAEL PITT, KELLY MCDONALD, MICHAEL SHANNON, MICHAEL KENNETH WILLIAMS, JACK HUSTON, GRETCHEN MOL  
**AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY/DVD

Adapted from the book *Boardwalk Empire: The Birth, High Times and Corruption of Atlantic City* this confrontingly violent HBO series is based on the life and times of crime kingpin Enoch "Nucky" Johnson. With Prohibition mere hours away prices for any form of alcohol are set to skyrocket opening all sorts of black market opportunities for the savvy businessman. Treasurer Nucky Johnson (Buscemi) has most of the City Council in his pocket, no hassles with the law thanks to his brother's appointment as sheriff and even has support from the African-American population due to his relationship with local leader Chalky White (Williams). All he really needs is some dedicated muscle and that's where surrogate son and returning war hero Jimmy Darmody (Pitt) comes in. As the stakes rise, everyone wants a piece of the pie leading to many bloody confrontations and shady back door deals with rival criminal organisations.

Watch this if you like *The Sopranos*

## Verdict

Unapologetically violent and gains momentum at a breakneck pace. Highly addictive.

9

"Unapologetically violent and gains momentum at a breakneck pace"



# The Slammin' Salmon

(MA15+)

**DIRECTOR:** KEVIN HEFFERNAN **CAST:** KEVIN HEFFERNAN, PAUL SOTER, ERIK STOLHANSKE, JAY CHANDRASEKHAR  
**AVAILABLE:** (OWN) \$ 25.99, 4671MB (HD)/(OWN) \$ 17.99, 1244MB (SD)

It boggles the mind that a crew of proven performers can fail to deliver repeatedly on later occasions. The comedy troupe Broken Lizard, those guys behind the hilarious *Super Troopers* and underrated *Beerfest*, suffer from this malady with almost every odd film in the group's resume a bonafide stinker. This could be attributed, in part, to the change of director, with Jay Chandrasekhar stepping out of the limelight to let Kevin Heffernan take the reins in his directorial debut. The wafer thin plot revolves around a Miami restaurant owner (Michael Clarke Duncan) who runs

a contest between waiters to see who can earn the most in a single night to help him pay off a debt to the mob. Lazy, forced and unfunny, it lacks the charm and spot on comedic timing the group is so well known for.

**Verdict** Gut-busting moments are few and far between. Far inferior to previous Broken Lizard efforts.

5

## PlayStation Store

## ▶ TOP TEN

## Movies on Demand



- 1 **The Hangover Part II** Warner Bros.
- 2 **Hanna** Focus Features
- 3 **Green Lantern** Warner Bros.
- 4 **Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2** Warner Bros.
- 5 **Cars 2** Disney Pixar
- 6 **Mr. Popper's Penguins** 20th Century Fox
- 7 **Tekken** Anchor Bay Entertainment
- 8 **Thor** Paramount Pictures
- 9 **Transformers: Dark of the Moon** Paramount Pictures
- 10 **Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides** Walt Disney Pictures

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## Fright Night (MA15+)

**DIRECTOR:** CRAIG GILLESPIE **CAST:** ANTON YELCHIN, COLIN FARRELL, TONI COLLETTE, IMOGEN POOTS, CHRISTOPHER MINTZ-PLASSE, DAVID TENNANT  
**AVAILABLE:** BLU-RAY/DVD

Taking its cues from the 1985 original comes this delightfully hilarious horror-comedy. Charley Brewster (Yelchin) suspects that his magnetic yet creepy neighbour Jerry (Farrell) is not all that he seems. His childhood buddy Ed (Mintz-Plasse) is convinced Jerry is a vampire and when he disappears without a trace Charley suspects foul play. Travelling to Las Vegas, he entreats illusionist extraordinaire and alleged vampire hunter Peter Vincent to help him in his crusade. Tennant, eager to discard the shackles of *Doctor Who*, embraces the role of douchebag Criss Angel wannabe Peter Vincent and is absolutely amazing, as is the 'turned' Ed as the world's least scariest vampire. It also heralds a return to form for Farrell as the wolf preying on the weak and turning them into a Happy Meal.

Watch this if you like *Shaun of the Dead*, *Redd Inc.*

**Verdict** Way more fun than it should be with extremely memorable moments from Tennant and Farrell

7



## Top Gear: The Challenges 5 (PG)

**DIRECTOR:** VARIOUS **CAST:** JEREMY CLARKSON, RICHARD HAMMOND, JAMES MAY **AVAILABLE ON:** DVD

Rattling off the challenges presented in this two-disc set is a bit like listing the stronger episodes of *The Simpsons*, as this latest set is a belter. The snappy segments are entertaining vignettes where the *Top Gear* lads go on an individual adventure, demonstrating the lighter side of motoring to fairly hilarious consequences. There's the Topsy Turvy Reliant Robins, where Jeremy details the history of the three-wheel death trap and struggles to keep one upright. There's the Dakar car versus the snowmobiles where Hammond barrels down a mountain being chased by snowmobiles. Captain Slow gets behind the wheel of a Veyron to tip it well and truly above 400km/h. It's an entertaining mix of comedy, ridiculousness and good fun.

Watch this if you like *Top Gear*

**Verdict** Perfect to dip in and out of. The best thing about each challenge is they're timeless.

8



## Crazy, Stupid, Love (M)

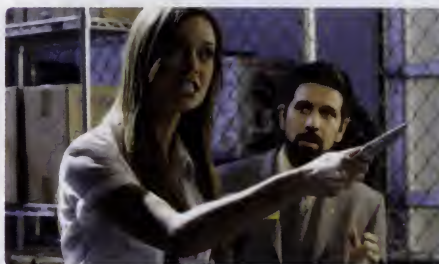
**DIRECTOR:** GLENN FICARRA AND JOHNREQUA **CAST:** STEVE CARRELL, JULIANNE MOORE, EMMA STONE, RYAN GOSLING, MARISA TOMEI, KEVIN BACON  
**AVAILABLE:** BLU-RAY/DVD

If you're like us and checked out the posters for *Crazy, Stupid, Love* you'd probably have filed it under "watch with the girlfriend" or "avoid like the plague", but you couldn't be farther from the truth. This touching, offbeat and unpredictable romantic comedy is engaging, hilarious and, most importantly, feels real. Cal Weaver (Carrell) has his perfect little world ripped apart when his wife and high school sweetheart cheats on him and wants a divorce. After disastrous attempts at coming to terms with this dramatic life change and adjusting to the dating game consummate ladies man Jacob Palmer (played to perfection by Gosling) takes him under his wing helping Cal rediscover his manhood. Be sure to keep an eye out for Marisa Tomei's scene stealing performance as one of Carrell's borderline insane jilted lovers.

Watch this if you like *Date Night*, *Knocked Up*

**Verdict** Undeserving of the label "rom-com", this is one seriously funny film with a whole lot of heart.

8



## Chuck: The Complete Fourth Season (M)

**DIRECTOR:** VARIOUS **CAST:** ZACHARY LEVI, YVONNE STRAHOVSKI, ADAM BALDWIN, LINDA HAMILTON, TIMOTHY DALTON **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY/DVD

Perennially on the chopping block at the end of each season *Chuck* has done extremely well to weather the storm. Mild mannered computer geek by day, super-spy by night, Chuck Bartowski (Levi) is on a mission to track down his long lost mother. Backed up by his sexy partner and girlfriend Sarah (Aussie Yvonne Strahovski who played *Mass Effect 2*'s Miranda) and one-man army Casey (Baldwin) the trio go toe-to-toe with Volkoff Industries and its maniacal leader Alexei Volkoff (magnificently hammed up by Timothy Dalton). An amazing roster of guest stars such as Armand Assante, Summer Glau, Eric Roberts, Dolph Lundgren and Gary Cole bolstering the already rock solid cast, *Chuck* hits all the right notes and is overflowing with pop culture references.

Watch this if you like *The Big Bang Theory*

**Verdict** Easily the best season yet with Timothy Dalton and Ray Wise a devilish dynamic duo.

9



## The Hour (MA15+)

**DIRECTOR:** COKY GIEDROYC **CAST:** BEN WHISHAW, ROMOLA GARAI, ANNA CHANCELLOR, ANTON LESSER, JULIAN RHIND-TUTT, DOMINIC WEST **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY/DVD

Set against the backdrop of the Suez Crisis of the mid 1950s, it centres on the newly launched BBC current affairs programme. Breaking convention for the time period Bel Rowley (Garai) is named producer much to the chagrin of her close friend Freddy (Whishaw) who believes he was overlooked for the job. The newly formed team experiences internal growing pains and external pressure, especially with the casting of pretty-boy Hector Madden (West) as the news anchor. When an old family friend apparently commits suicide, Freddy's investigation uncovers a larger conspiracy involving the government, covert operations and foreign agents. Comparisons with the US series *Mad Men* are a little on the nose, with *The Hour* easily outstripping its colony competitor, unsurprisingly.

Watch this if you like *State of Play*, *Mad Men*

**Verdict** Incredibly well written, an all star UK cast, gripping and compelling.

9



## Submarine (M)

**DIRECTOR:** RICHARD AYOADE **CAST:** CRAIG ROBERTS, NOAH TAYLOR, SALLY HAWKINS, YASMIN PAIGE, PADDY CONSIDINE **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY/DVD

Oliver Tate is a neurotic 15-year-old who lives in Wales with his uptight mother and equally disturbed father (superbly, awkwardly played by Noah Taylor). Oliver's desperately trying to find some sense of identity and lose his virginity, and winds up being used by the acerbic and confident Jordana Brewster who wants to settle a score at high school with her ex-boyfriend, whom Oliver stands up to with mixed results. Director Richard Ayoade is the guy with the glasses and wild curly hair in *The I.T. Crowd*, and he's taken the screenplay that's been adapted from the novel to make it his own. While *Submarine*'s slow to start, Oliver battles with his own demons, both invented and forced upon him by his parents whose quiet, unsettling arguments are driving them apart, helped in part by the reemergence of his mother's old boyfriend. Funny, touching and very understated.

Watch this if you like *Juno*

**Verdict** A coming of age story that's odd, beautifully paced and totally watchable.

8



## ▶ NOW SHOWING

# Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy

(MA15+)

**DIRECTOR:** TOMAS ALFREDSON **CAST:** GARY OLDMAN, COLIN FIRTH, JOHN HURT, TOBY JONES, TOM HARDY, MARK STRONG **IN CINEMAS:** JANUARY 26

Based on the book by John Le Carre, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* is an old-fashioned Cold War spy tale. There's plenty of double crossing and power plays, backed by a powerhouse cast who'll keep you rapt throughout.

It's 1970-something and the height of the Cold War. After a British agent ends up being shot in an covert overseas operation, head of MI6, Control (Hurt) and his right-hand man George Smiley (Oldman) are forced out. However, reports of a Soviet mole within 'the Circus' prompt the new order to bring Smiley out of retirement to run his own secret operation.

You should know that we're a million miles away from the world of James Bond and *Mission: Impossible*. The organisation here is dull and oppressive, where the men under pressure work in drab offices in a tightly regimented structure, where the threat of double-crossing always lurks, and the people you rely on can't truly be trusted. Or they're used and tossed aside like Jim Prideaux (Strong), who is left broken and haunted by his failure.

While the pace is languid and the suspense slowly builds, the plot requires a lot of concentration to process and digest everything. There are wheels within wheels turning ominously; very little can be taken on face value, save for a truly edge-of-the-seat daylight raid on a library of documents.

Everything in Alfredson's interpretation of Le Carre's book is dealt with subtly, planned out meticulously. Hang on in the last half hour and the punch of who did what to whom will leave you reeling.

Watch this if you like *The Constant Gardener*



"Sure is windy today! It's messing up my hair something fierce" Shut the %\$#& up, Bob



Man, we hope that dog craps

# Young Adult

(MA15+)

**DIRECTOR:** JASON REITMAN **CAST:** CHARLIZE THERON, PATTON OSWALT, PATRICK WILSON, ELIZABETH REASER, COLLETTE WOLFE **IN CINEMAS:** JANUARY 19

Mavis Gray (Theron) is a 30-something who lives in Mineapolis in a small, cluttered apartment with her dog, writing novels for young adults, getting drunk at night and waking up the next morning with a bottle of Diet Coke ready to start the whole process over again. Her ex-boyfriend's wife surprises her with an email announcing the birth of their new baby daughter, sparking Mavis into visiting the small town where she grew up, in the hope of winning back her ex (Wilson), baby and wife be damned.

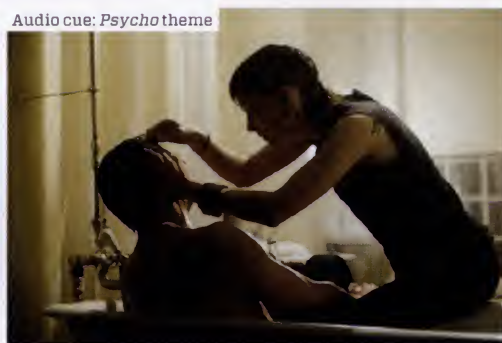
Mavis is narcissistic, an alcoholic and delusional. She's perpetually hung up on the past, judging and comparing herself and others on their social achievements in high school, scornful of anyone not worth her time. One character describes her best as that "psychotic prom-queen bitch" as she flirts with her ex who is near

oblivious to her scheme.

Another guy from high school, Matt (Oswalt), a disabled and self described 'fat geek' whom she never gave a second to in the past, warns her about what she's doing. He's the only one ready to tell her the truth about how pathetic she is as she spirals into a situation that could never possibly work – while he's not above revealing his ugly side.

Though she sounds nothing like a person you'd want to watch for a little over an hour and a half of your time, Theron throws everything into this dark comedy written by *Juno*'s Diablo Cody, and both Theron and Oswalt are beguilingly charming. Their clashing relationship tries to buff Mavis towards some type of moral salvation, but as the credits suddenly roll the sad and unsatisfying conclusion doesn't match up to the bittersweet end that Cody and Reitman crafted on *Juno*, or even Reitman's own *Up In The Air*.

Audio cue: *Psycho* theme



# The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo

(MA15+)

**DIRECTOR:** DAVID FINCHER **CAST:** DANIEL CRAIG, ROONEY MARA, CHRISTOPHER PLUMMER, STELLAN SKARSGARD, ROBIN WRIGHT **IN CINEMAS:** NOW

Adapted from the superb *Millennium* trilogy by Stieg Larsson comes this Americanised reinterpretation. The stylised David Fincher remake is more readily digestible for mass market audiences than those pesky subtleties of the Swedish original that force you to engage your brain.

Veteran journalist Mikael Blomkvist, seeking respite from his professional woes, has been hired to find a missing young girl who disappeared over 40 years ago. Enlisting the help of unconventional hacker Lisbeth Salander the pair work to uncover the truth amidst a web of lies and misdirection from a family who would rather leave the past buried.

The casting of all around badass Daniel Craig as the mild mannered Mikael Blomkvist is an odd choice, and the actor does a decent enough job as does Mara Rooney as Lisbeth Salander, the role that put actress Noomi Rapace on the map, though the balance seems slightly off kilter with Craig showing a tad too much strength at times and Rooney not quite enough. That's not to say it's not a decent enough film, it certainly is, but the original is far superior.



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# index

## ABOUT THE INDEX

Check out our handy index of all the PS3 titles we feel you should play (and some you shouldn't). Please note: scores are a reflection of a game's comparative quality at the time of release and will not change - but the index may be updated as titles age or are superseded by new games.

### ACTION

- 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand** 7  
SWORDFISH STUDIOS  
So dumb it's dangerously good. Better than it sounds.
- Captain America: Super Soldier** 4  
NEXT LEVEL GAMES  
Beguilingly awful through and through.
- Alien Breed 3: Descent** 7  
TEAM 17  
Top-down twin-stick affair that doesn't do enough to improve upon its predecessors.
- Army of Two: The 40th Day** 7  
EA MONTREAL  
Still bone-headed but a lot tighter and more fun than the original *Army of Two*.
- Avatar** 7  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
One of the first 3D games. Dull, now.
- RECOMMENDED Bayonetta** 9  
PLATINUM GAMES  
It takes balls to make a game this violent, sexy and weird.
- RECOMMENDED Beyond Good & Evil HD** 8  
UBISOFT  
It's aged graphically but still remains one of the most charming games ever.
- Bionic Commando** 7  
GRIN  
The great moments are few and far between.
- RECOMMENDED BloodRayne: Betrayal** 8  
WAYFORWARD  
A classy and colourful beat-'em-up that rewards exploration.
- The Bourne Conspiracy** 7  
HIGH MOON STUDIOS  
Great presentation and vibe, samey action.
- RECOMMENDED Castle Crashers** 8  
THE BEHEMOTH  
Violent but classy side-scrolling cartoon RPG-action. Best played in co-op.
- RECOMMENDED Child of Eden** 8  
Q ENTERTAINMENT  
You need a Move controller to wring the best out of this weird and wonderful blaster.
- The Club** 8  
BIZARRE CREATIONS  
Original, compulsive and fun.
- Damnation** 3  
BLUE OMEGA ENTERTAINMENT  
Uninspired level design, broken gameplay.
- Dark Void** 6  
AIRTIGHT GAMES  
Uninspiring graphics, lacklustre sound and dull, dull combat.
- RECOMMENDED Dead Rising 2: Off The Record** 9  
CAPCOM VANCOUVER  
A totally fresh update. If you missed it first time around, grab it now.
- Dead to Rights: Retribution** 6  
VOLATILE GAMES  
Fine, but doesn't do enough to stand out. Needs more dog.
- Devil May Cry 4** 7  
CAPCOM  
Memorable bosses but prepare to backtrack.
- Earth Defense Force: Insect Armageddon** 5  
VICIOUS CYCLE SOFTWARE  
Ugly, repetitive and about 10 years out of date.



### El Shaddai: Ascension of the Metatron

**DEVELOPER:** IGNITION TOKYO  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** MINDSCAPE. **PLAYERS:** 1  
"Probably the most breathtakingly beautiful and aesthetically inventive game on the PS3 so far. It flits between genres and will hook you into its deceptively deep combat system that demands creativity to fully master."

8

**RECOMMENDED Final Fight: Double Impact** 8  
PROPER GAMES  
Two games in one. Forget about *Magic Sword* and instead just dive into *Final Fight*.

**RECOMMENDED Galaga Legends DX** 8  
NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS  
Bullet hell made pretty.

**Genji: Days of the Blade** 5  
GAME REPUBLIC  
Flashy graphics, giant enemy crabs, piss-poor plodding gameplay.

**RECOMMENDED Ghostbusters: The Video Game** 9  
TERMINAL REALITY / THREEWAVE SOFTWARE  
Robust, charming and impeccably presented.

**RECOMMENDED House of the Dead: Overkill - Extended Cut** 8  
HEADSTRONG GAMES  
Has its tongue so far in its cheek it's almost poking out the other side. Requires Move.

**Hunted: The Demon's Forge** 7  
INXILE  
A textbook example of 'airlight'. Co-op rules.

**John Woo Presents: Stranglehold** 7  
MIDWAY CHICAGO  
Packs frantic Max Payne-lite fun.

**ESSENTIAL Just Cause 2** 9  
AVALANCHE STUDIOS  
Parachutes. Grappling hooks. Stripper zeppelins. An insane action game.

**Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days** 7  
IO INTERACTIVE  
Michael Mann/YouTube visuals? Great. The game? Average.

**NEW Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest** 5  
SAN DIEGO STUDIO / ZIND AGI GAMES  
So-so shooty kids game that needs Move.

**Mercenaries 2: World in Flames** 8  
PANDEMIC STUDIOS  
Weak in many areas but has fun in spades. *The Saboteur* does it better, though.

**Ninja Gaiden Sigma** 8  
TEAM NINJA  
Violent but ace, despite its age.

**RECOMMENDED Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2** 8  
TEAM NINJA  
A sexy and rock hard title but the gore's been cut.



### Pac-Man Championship Edition DX

**DEVELOPER:** NAMCO BANDAI  
**DISTRIBUTOR:** NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS  
**PLAYERS:** 1

"An evolutionary sequel that will put blisters on your eyeballs and thumbs. Hypnotically addictive and absolutely value packed, it's one of the best games you can buy on the PSN."

9

**RECOMMENDED PixelJunk SideScroller** 8  
Q-GAMES  
Old school fun meets new age design in a blaster that's very tricky.

**RECOMMENDED Prototype** 8  
RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT  
A simple superhero kill-fest but a truckload of guilty fun.

**Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One** 7  
INSOMNIAC GAMES  
Chaotic, confusing and a bit dull.

**Red Faction: Armageddon** 7  
VOLITION, INC.  
Brown, corridor-based action that will leave you snoring. Get *Guerrilla* instead.

**RECOMMENDED Red Faction: Guerrilla** 9  
VOLITION, INC.  
The best destruction effects ever, hands down, with loads to see and do.

**RECOMMENDED Renegade Ops** 8  
AVALANCHE STUDIOS  
A sleek twin-stick shooter with split screen and furious competitive four player co-op.

**NEW Rocketbirds: Hardboiled Chicken** 7  
RATLOOP ASIA  
Superbly animated and smarter than you'd initially think. Punishing at times!

**NEW RECOMMENDED Saints Row 3** 9  
VOLITION, INC.  
Big, brash and unapologetically dumb fun. 'Over the top' doesn't come close.

**Scott Pilgrim vs. the World** 7  
UBISOFT  
Distinctly old-school and charming but you need three mates and a lot of patience.

**RECOMMENDED SOCOM: Special Forces** 8  
ZIPPER INTERACTIVE  
Great online with Move and a Sharp Shooter, though solo ain't that special.

**Time Crisis: Razing Storm** 6  
NAMCO BANDAI  
Simple, short light gun fare. Ignore the new first-person shooter mode, it's awful.

**Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2** 8  
RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT  
A tense, realistic shooter. Cool gadgets.

**Transformers: Dark of the Moon** 5  
HIGH MOON STUDIOS  
A near brainless movie tie-in with little merit.

**Transformers: War for Cybertron** 7  
HIGH MOON STUDIOS  
Good multiplayer, and that's about it.

**RECOMMENDED Vanquish** 8  
PLATINUM GAMES  
Whip quick third-person thrills. Play it now.

**Wanted: Weapons of Fate** 5  
GRIN  
Designed only to appeal to mentally-subnormal 11-year-olds.

**RECOMMENDED Warhawk** 9  
INCOGNITO ENTERTAINMENT / SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO  
Furiously addictive. Tighter than a bull's arse on fight night.

**WET** 8  
A2M  
Tonnes of grindhouse style, little substance. We doubt you'd bother with it now.

**Wheelman** 6  
MIDWAY STUDIOS - NEWCASTLE / TIGON STUDIOS  
Rubbish. Underdone throughout.

### ACTION-ADVENTURE

**3D Dot Game Heroes** 7  
FROM SOFTWARE  
If you pine for the past you'll feel like this was made just for you

**Alice: Madness Returns** 7  
SPICY HORSE  
Marries great ideas with average platforming.

**RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed** 10  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
A landmark title that's dated now.

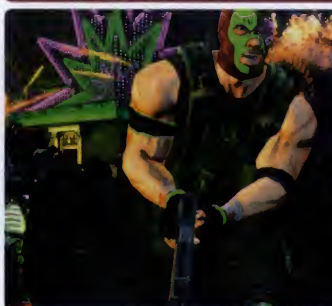
**RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed II** 9  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
When everything gels correctly it casually murders its predecessor.

**ESSENTIAL Assassin's Creed Brotherhood** 10  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
The pinnacle of the series so far and the multiplayer is outstanding.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed Revelations** 8  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
A safe but solid title that feels more like a (really big) expansion than a true sequel.

**RECOMMENDED Batman: Arkham Asylum** 8  
ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS  
Really delivers the goods, and even though the sequel's out you need this too.

### Metacritic: radical hatred on the games you like



**Website:** metacritic.com **Game:** Saints Row **The Third. Reviewer:** chipe **Score:** 0

Holy Cod this is a horrible game. *GTA* with training wheels. No challenge or suspense whatsoever. Just a goofy and carelessly programmed sandbox game. However, there is one caveat: if you have the brain of a 6 year old, this game will provide almost limitless entertainment. Lots of colours and wacky stuff and "humor" geared towards hateful/depressed people and bigots in general.



## Hump Day

**Resistance 3** is one of the few games that's actively set in Australia. Insomniac have captured the feel of the dusty town before visiting the area, and as such it's missing something known to the area: camels. Says Insomniac's Jon Paquette, "I actually didn't know camels were popular in Australia until I got here. I thought a kangaroo [in the game] would be a stereotype... I didn't want to sort of piss people off. No 'shrimp on the barbie'."



**Demon's Souls**  
FROM SOFTWARE  
Those looking for an extreme challenge might have met their match.

**RECOMMENDED Enslaved**  
NINJA THEORY  
A fun platforming romp based on the same classic story as TV's *Monkey* was.

**Fairytale Fights**  
PLAYLOGIC GAME FACTORY  
Quirky and sadistic but too simplistic.

**Folklore**  
GAME REPUBLIC  
Original and surprising with moments of genius.

**The Godfather II**  
EA REDWOOD SHORES  
Starts as a decent crime caper but alienates fans of the film. Play *Mafia II* instead.

**ESSENTIAL God of War III**  
SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO  
A showcase. Old-fashioned arse-kicking, astonishing visuals.

**RECOMMENDED God of War Collection**  
SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO / BLUEPOINT GAMES  
Age has not diminished its impact. A must-get.

**RECOMMENDED God of War Collection Volume II**  
READY AT DAWN  
Two of the best PSP games now on your PS3. Meticulously updated and pretty to look at.

**ESSENTIAL Grand Theft Auto IV**  
ROCKSTAR NORTH  
The technical scope and scale of GTA/IV dwarfs all. Remarkable.

**ESSENTIAL Grand Theft Auto: Episodes from Liberty City**  
ROCKSTAR NORTH  
Two new single-player campaigns, expanded multiplayer and a vast array of new weapons and vehicles. Explosive shotgun? Yes please.

**Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince**  
EA BRIGHT LIGHT STUDIO  
Play the first 30 minutes and you've played the whole game.

**Heavenly Sword**  
NINJA THEORY  
Long in the tooth but still looks slick.

**NEW Hydrophobia: Prophecy**  
DARK ENERGY DIGITAL  
Shoddy game, great water tech.

**RECOMMENDED inFAMOUS**  
SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS  
A superpowered take on the urban crime-fighting sandbox. Get this and the sequel.

**RECOMMENDED inFAMOUS 2**  
SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS  
Bigger and better, and the level editor is solid.

**LEGO Batman**  
TRAVELLER'S TALES  
Faithful, but the formula is getting a bit old.

**LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4**  
TRAVELLER'S TALES  
The most thorough LEGO universe yet but it is getting a bit samey.

**NEW LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7**  
TRAVELLER'S TALES  
As per above. You'd have to be a fan.

**RECOMMENDED LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures**  
TRAVELLER'S TALES  
Happiness and wonder overcame us with this joyous adaptation.

**LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean**  
TRAVELLER'S TALES  
You should know from the title if you'd like this or not. It is what it is, and it's okay.

**LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars**  
TRAVELLER'S TALES  
Bum subject, excellent lightsaber action. Kids should adore it.

**Lost: Via Domus**  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
Some solid adventuring, but the voice acting is rubbish.

**Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom**  
GAME REPUBLIC  
A feel-good romp that's a little old-fashioned. If you can find it cheap grab it for a rainy day.

**RECOMMENDED Mafia II**  
2K CZECH  
Its attention to detail, presentation and sound is to be admired.

**ESSENTIAL Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots**  
KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS  
Yes, it's as much a movie as it is a game but the production values are insane. Epic.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Metal Gear Solid HD Collection**  
KONAMI  
MGS2 has aged, *Snake Eater* is still all class and *Peace Walker* rocks.

**Overlord II**  
TRIUMPH STUDIOS  
Refined gameplay and more jokes but control quirks persist.

**Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands**  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
Harks back to the original Prince.

**RECOMMENDED Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time**  
INSOMNIAC GAMES  
Reinvigorates the genre without reinventing the wheel.

**RECOMMENDED Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction**  
INSOMNIAC GAMES  
A big, wild, good ol' fashioned adventure.



**Red Dead Redemption**  
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS  
PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR PLAYERS: 1-16  
"A sweeping epic that's among the best games we've ever played and better than *GTA IV* in a lot of crucial areas. Also, the zombie-themed *Undead Nightmare* DLC is totally boss. Grab the Game of the Year edition for max value."

**RECOMMENDED Resident Evil 4**  
CAPCOM  
A straight port. You've played this already.

**RECOMMENDED Resident Evil 5**  
CAPCOM  
A grand, bloody adventure but the inventory system remains bad.

**RECOMMENDED The Saboteur**  
PANDEMIC STUDIOS  
Charming and packed with action. Great, unique visual style.

**Shadows of the Damned**  
GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE  
Full of dick jokes and so-so gameplay from two geniuses of design. Pity.

**Silent Hill Homecoming**  
DOUBLE HELIX GAMES  
New combat system is good, but lacks the cerebral chills.

**Sonic the Hedgehog**  
SONIC TEAM  
There are cheaper ways to get a spare Blu-ray case.

**Sonic Unleashed**  
SONIC TEAM  
3D adventuring that betrays the character.

**Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions**  
BEENOX  
Looks great – but why have we gone back to swinging from invisible hooks in the sky?

**Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II**  
LUCASARTS  
Earns a point-and-a-bit for every hour that it is long. Technically superior but still rough.



## THE BEST PSone CLASSICS ON PlayStation®Store



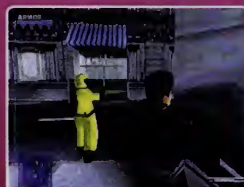
**FINAL FANTASY VII**  
DEVELOPER: SQUARE  
PLAYERS: 1  
The RPG upon which all other RPGs are generally judged, *Final Fantasy VII* is a modern classic and a worthy part of every credible videogame library.



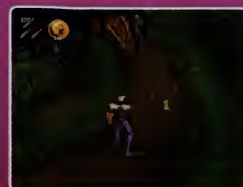
**DRIVER**  
DEVELOPER: REFLECTIONS  
INTERACTIVE PLAYERS: 1  
The original *Driver* hit PlayStation like a blast of fresh air. Hectic car chases through 3D cities may old-hat now but when *Driver* debuted it was like nothing we'd seen.



**CRASH BANDICOOT 3: WARPED**  
DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG  
PLAYERS: 1  
The best platformer on any PlayStation. As far as old-school run and jump action in purpose-built levels goes, *this* is the zenith.



**SYPHON FILTER**  
DEVELOPER: EIDETIC  
PLAYERS: 1  
If you still think *Syphon Filter* was a MGS rip-off you're misled. Play it again and tell us this awesome series doesn't deserve a PS3 comeback.



**MEDIEVAL**  
DEVELOPER: SCE STUDIO  
CAMBRIDGE PLAYERS: 1  
Speaking of games that deserve a PS3 comeback, where's *Sir Dan*? Fantasy hack 'n slash meets the supernatural, *MediEvil* still does it better than most since.





inhouse

FEATURED STUDIO OF THE MONTH

# Relentless Software

LOCATION: BRIGHTON, UK FOUNDED: 2003  
BEST KNOWN FOR: BUZZ! THE MUSIC QUIZ

Relentless Software sprang into life in 2003 as a kind of reaction to prevailing trends in game development. Following the implosion their previous employer, co-founders Andrew Eades and David Amor set out to create a stable, professional environment for game development, free of the chaotic perpetual crunch periods that characterise most modern studios.

Instead, Relentless functions more or less identically to any other office environment: 9am starts, 35 hour weeks, tidy working areas, and strict policies prohibiting employees from bludging on the internet or otherwise wasting time. Sound strict? It is a little bit, but the point is, it works. After almost a decade in the industry, Relentless has racked up over \$700 million in revenue, making it one of Britain's most successful developers, and one of Sony's most respected first-party studios.

Of course, there's more to Relentless' success than its fastidious commitment to regularity and order. From the outset, the studio has focused exclusively on games that – in the words of the official company website – “anyone can enjoy, without a steep learning curve.” If your mum can't play it, then chances are Relentless didn't make it. It is, in every respect, a developer

committed to making games with mass-market appeal.

Witness *Buzz! The Music Quiz*. By far the company's most popular product to date, Relentless has developed a total of 10 *Buzz!* titles over the last eight years, which have sold a combined total of over 10 million units. And it's not hard to see why.

With its brash and vibrant aesthetic, charismatic muppet-headed host (voiced by our very own Jason Donovan), and simple, immediately accessible quiz-show inspired gameplay, *Buzz!* was perfectly positioned to capitalise on the emerging “lifestyle gaming” trend that has since become so obscenely popular.

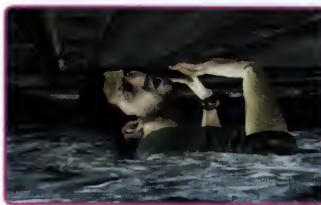
Keen to establish a reputation as more than just “the people who made *Buzz!*”, Relentless has undergone restructuring of late and is gradually shifting its focus onto smaller, self-published titles – the first being the charming and funny episodic puzzle game, *Blue Toad Murder Files: The Mysteries of Little Riddle*. With over 250,000 copies sold on PSN, *Blue Toad* has given Relentless the capital it needs to pursue its own creative path. We can't wait to see where it leads.

**RECOMMENDED** *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent*  
UBISOFT SHANGHAI  
Obsessive and gripping, online and off.

**Toy Story 3**  
AVALANCHE SOFTWARE  
Cute, simple, and charming as hell.

**ESSENTIAL** *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* 10  
NAUGHTY DOG  
It's aged now, but still belongs on your shelf.

**ESSENTIAL** *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* 10  
NAUGHTY DOG  
This is the reason Hollywood is so worried about videogames.



**Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception** 10  
DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG  
PUBLISHER: SCEE PLAYERS: 1

“Impeccable in every regard. The action ramps up and up, taking you on foot-chases to teeth-gritting firefights and beyond to stunning set pieces. Totally complements and enhances the other games in the series.”

**RECOMMENDED** *Yakuza 4* 8  
CS1 TEAM  
One for the fans, but it's very refreshing.

## ADVENTURE

**NEW RECOMMENDED** *The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn* 6  
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER  
Well intentioned but dull. You'll get a kick out of co-op, however.

**RECOMMENDED** *Back to the Future: The Game Episode 1* 8  
TELLTALE GAMES  
Fairly simple puzzles but, Great Scott, it looks and feels amazing.

**RECOMMENDED** *Heavy Rain* 8  
QUANTIC DREAM  
Not quite a revolution but very clever and very well-crafted.

**NEW** *Jurassic Park: The Game* 4  
TELLTALE GAMES  
Rammed with QTEs and poorly made.

**ESSENTIAL** *L.A. Noire* 10  
TEAM BOND  
Slow-paced, laboriously detailed and well-executed.

**Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust** 1  
TEAM17 SOFTWARE  
An amazing new low for this generation.

**NEW** *NCIS: The Game* 5  
UBISOFT SHANGHAI  
The format and lack of action means it's only for hardcore fans of the show.

**RECOMMENDED** *Stacking* 8  
DOUBLE FINE  
A truly unique concept and a real brain tickler.

## FIGHTING

**RECOMMENDED** *BlazBlue: Continuum Shift* 9  
ARC SYSTEM WORKS  
Still wilder, wackier and noisier than anything else on PS3.

*Dragon Ball Z: Ultimate Tenkaichi* 7  
SPIKE CO. LTD  
Grand scale and scope but gets repetitive.

*The Fight: Lights Out* 5  
COLDWOOD INTERACTIVE  
The Move controls don't feel as organic as we'd hoped they would. Sorry Danny Trejo.

**NEW** *The King of Fighters XIII* 6  
SNK  
Better than last year with new mechanics, but still crusty.

**RECOMMENDED** *Mortal Kombat* 8  
NETHERREALM  
Technically not available in Aus, it's a sterling return to form for the series. Funny, too.

**RECOMMENDED** *Soulcalibur IV* 8  
NAMCO BANDAI  
Phenomenal, but will let down those expecting a revolution.

**RECOMMENDED** *Street Fighter III - Third Strike Online Edition* 9  
IRON GALAXY  
Very different from IV and utterly brilliant.

**ESSENTIAL** *Super Street Fighter IV* 10  
CAPCOM/DIMPS  
Vibrant looking and superb online. Comes with a stack characters, all unlocked. It's the best value version of *SFIV* out there.

*Super Street Fighter IV Arcade Edition* 8  
CAPCOM  
For first time purchasers only. For everyone else there's DLC.

**RECOMMENDED** *Tekken 6* 8  
NAMCO BANDAI  
Easy to play, with the biggest roster ever. Feels a bit old, though.

**NEW** *Tekken Hybrid* 7  
NAMCO BANDAI PARTNER  
*Tekken Tag Tournament HD* is still loads of fun, and is the star of this package.

**RECOMMENDED** *Ultimate Marvel vs.* 8  
CAPCOM 3  
CAPCOM  
Blinding action with a roster you deserve, but still feels like it should've been DLC.

## THE BEST PSP GAMES



**GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES**  
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR LEEDS  
PLAYERS: 1-6

This is about as remarkable as gaming gets on a handheld console. A fully-fledged 3D GTA, just like the PS2 versions, on PSP – and it feels absolutely brilliant. Also? Phil Collins is in it. No, we're totally serious.



**MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM UNITE**  
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM  
PLAYERS: 1-4

*Monster Hunter* is a true system seller in its native Japan and it deserves that sort of awareness here. It's an adventure game to lose your life to, rewarding you in spades if you're able to put the effort in. Even better with mates.



**WIPEOUT PULSE**  
DEVELOPER: SCE LIVERPOOL  
PLAYERS: 1-8

Beautiful and weighted just right, it's a futurist's wet dream. There's a reason *Wipeout* just works – and this is proof. Depending on which day of the week you ask us this just pips the likes of *Burnout Legends* and *Gran Turismo* for best racing game on PSP.



**METAL GEAR SOLID: PEACE WALKER**  
DEVELOPER: KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS  
PLAYERS: 1-6

A proper, well-produced and thought-out *Metal Gear*; this is a must-have. The story's great and the action is totally addictive. We can't stress it enough: buy this game, and a PSP if you must. This a title that no gamer should miss.



**GOD OF WAR: GHOST OF SPARTA**  
DEVELOPER: READY AT DAWN  
PLAYERS: 1

Stupidly better than the already excellent *Chains of Olympus*, this still has fantastic graphics and tighter-than-hades gameplay. If you're a fan of the series, this is a crucial part of the saga you really shouldn't miss.



**WWE '12**  
YUKE'S MEDIA CREATIONS  
QTE-central with sloppy controls. A major step backwards.

**WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010**  
YUKE'S  
If the soap-drama of the WWE's your thing, welcome to nirvana.

## FLIGHT

**Ace Combat: Assault Horizon**  
PROJECT ACES  
Reality-bending fare that lacks depth.

**Air Conflicts: Secrets Wars**  
BITCOMPOSER  
Haphazard design, unforgivable mistakes and awful sound make this a true dud.

**Apache: Air Assault**  
GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT  
Hardcore chopper sim with impressive detail but lacks variety. Good online, though.

**Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII**  
UBISOFT ROMANIA  
Solid, varied, but not quite the ace of aces.

**Heroes Over Europe**  
TRANSMISSION GAMES  
A little rough but not bad. *IL-2* is much better.



**IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey**  
DEVELOPER: GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT  
PUBLISHER: AFA PLAYERS: 1-16  
"Head turning visuals, astonishing attention to detail, brilliant sound effects and stacks of ratta-tat action all combine in this truly surprisingly awesome aerial combat game. To be honest it's the best flight game we've ever played"

**Lair**  
FACTORS  
Rushed and unfinished. Deeply disappointing.

**RECOMMENDED Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. 2**  
UBISOFT ROMANIA  
A top gun successor. More detail, better mission design.

## MUSIC

**AC/DC Live: Rock Band Track Pack**  
HARMONIX  
Bare-bones stuff but the music is worth it. Fully exportable.

**Band Hero**  
NEVERSOFT  
It works but the songs have been censored.

**RECOMMENDED The Beatles: Rock Band**  
HARMONIX  
Outstanding. This is a tribute like no other.

**RECOMMENDED DJ Hero 2**  
FREESTYLEGAMES  
Some great improvements and some excellent, unique mixes.

**RECOMMENDED Green Day: Rock Band**  
HARMONIX  
Very good. Up there with *The Beatles: Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero: Metallica*.

**Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock**  
NEVERSOFT  
The last *GH* with a mostly decent soundtrack.

**Guitar Hero World Tour**  
NEVERSOFT  
Good, but missing crucial elements that make *Rock Band* better.

**Guitar Hero 5**  
NEVERSOFT  
Improving, but the hipster tracklist is a dud.

**RECOMMENDED Guitar Hero: Metallica**  
NEVERSOFT  
The best in the series since *Guitar Hero III*.

**Guitar Hero: Van Halen**  
UNDERGROUND DEVELOPMENT  
Only buy this cheap: \$90 is an insult. USA *GH5* buyers got it as a free bonus.

**Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock**  
NEVERSOFT  
Functional, but it just isn't evolving at the same rate as its peers.

**LEGO Rock Band**  
HARMONIX / TRAVELLER'S TALES  
Cute. Fewer tracks than we'd like though.

**Michael Jackson The Experience**  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
Better with mates but feels cheap.

**ESSENTIAL Rock Band 2**  
HARMONIX  
The best music game series around.

**RECOMMENDED Rock Band 3**  
HARMONIX  
Improvements to the interface abound, but it's only as good as your existing DLC library.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Rocksmith**  
UBISOFT  
More an educational tool than game, but it works really, really well.

**SingStar**  
SCE LONDON STUDIO  
Will last as long as the PS3 with so much DLC.

## PARTY

**Ape Escape**  
JAPAN STUDIO  
A serious misstep. An on-rails shooter where the monkeys run towards you? Pass.

**EyePet**  
SCE LONDON STUDIO  
Harmless fun but pointless for adults.

**Kung Fu Rider**  
JAPAN STUDIO  
Waggle-based rubbish. A terrible example of a Move game.

**PlayStation Move Heroes**  
Nihilistic Software  
One for undemanding kids. Fun but bland.

**The Shoot**  
COHORT STUDIOS  
A limited Move rail shooter. Cool presentation.

**RECOMMENDED Sports Champions**  
ZINDAGI GAMES  
Despite a few quirks this is a must-have Move title.

**NEW Start the Party! Save the World!**  
SUPERMASSIVE GAMES  
A Move game for the very young.

**Yoostar 2**  
BLITZ GAME STUDIOS  
Imperfect yet hilarious movie karaoke title.

## PUZZLE/PLATFORMER

**RECOMMENDED Braid**  
HOTHEAD GAMES  
Probably the best-ever example of how to implement time-bending physics.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Catherine**  
ATLUS  
Niche, but addictive and challenging.

**RECOMMENDED Chime**  
ZOE MODE  
A music-based puzzler where you need to slot in blocks to rockin' (and chilled) beats.

**RECOMMENDED de Blob 2**  
BLUE TONGUE ENTERTAINMENT  
Surprisingly fun, fresh and colourful. Get it if you can, Blue Tongue no longer exist.

## 8-bit hit

Chiptunes have been used to remarkable effect in the PSN side-scroller *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* by renowned chiptune artist Anamanaguchi. There's just one question: what the hell is chiptune music? It's music that's created from old, hacked hardware (think your aging monochrome handhelds), with custom software that plays a tune. The key is to use the chips and their limited range built into the hardware to make a brand new track.



**RECOMMENDED Flight Control**  
FIREMINT  
One of the best Move games ever that'll eat your time if you succumb to it.

**RECOMMENDED Joe Danger**  
HELLO GAMES  
A platformer that's also a puzzler with bundles of charm and tough as a boot.

**RECOMMENDED Katamari Forever**  
NAMCO BANDAI  
Joyfulness, digitally realised, and it'll challenge you too. Infectious.

**RECOMMENDED LittleBigPlanet 2**  
MEDIA MOLECULE  
Like the original it's innovative and never-ending. Improves upon an amazing product.

**RECOMMENDED Outland**  
HOUSEMARQUE  
Librally copies bits from old-school *Castlevania* but it does it well. Very clever.

**RECOMMENDED Plants vs. Zombies**  
POPCAP GAMES  
Insanely iconic and smart tower defense. A little bit expensive, so get it on sale.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Rayman Origins**  
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER  
One of the most gorgeous games to ever hit the PS3. Great co-op too.

**RECOMMENDED The Sly Collection**  
SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS  
A surprisingly fun and fresh bunch of gems.

**RECOMMENDED Sonic 4: Episode 1**  
SONIC TEAM  
The second best Sonic game in about a decade but as a platformer it's so-so.

**Sonic Generations**  
SONIC TEAM  
Starts out great and falters towards the end. A stunning homage to everything Sonic

**Worms: Crazy Golf**  
TEAM 17  
Originally for smartphones, and it hasn't translated well. Fun in micro bursts.

## RACING/DRIVING

**Blur**  
BIZARRE CREATIONS  
A race to power-ups rather than a racer with power-ups.

**RECOMMENDED Burnout Paradise**  
CRITERION GAMES  
Stunning and sharp but we miss the dedicated Crash Mode.

**Colin McRae: DIRT 2**  
CODEMASTERS  
Drives fine but it's style over substance here.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Daytona USA**  
SEGA  
Addictive as ever and arcade perfect.

**RECOMMENDED DIRT 3**  
CODEMASTERS  
A welcome return to form. Great car roster, awesome handling, incredible sound.

**RECOMMENDED Driver: San Francisco**  
REFLECTIONS  
The series returns to its roots and delivers superb action-adventure racing in a gorgeous looking package. A must get.

**RECOMMENDED F1 2011**  
CODEMASTERS  
A tactical and graphical improvement over last year. Even better with a Logitech wheel.

**Fuel**  
ASOBO STUDIOS  
Huge, but bugged, boring and undercooked. Deserves to be left in the bargain bin.



**Gran Turismo 5**  
DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL  
PUBLISHER: SONY PLAYERS: 1-16

"GT5 feels familiar, and is still an RPG masquerading as a racing game. It looks stunning with class-leading lighting effects and exceptionally modelled premium cars, and with a G27 wheel it feels incredible. We just wish that there were some more recent cars."

**RECOMMENDED ModNation Racers**  
UNITED FRONT GAMES  
An incredible package. Creating is even more fun than racing.

**MotoGP 10/11**  
MONUMENTAL GAMES  
Dull presentation and crap controls wreck it.

**MotorStorm**  
EVOLUTION STUDIOS  
Fast, hard and dirty, but a little old now.

**MotorStorm: Pacific Rift**  
EVOLUTION STUDIOS  
Boasts spitscreen but visually it hasn't come on far enough.

**MotorStorm Apocalypse**  
EVOLUTION STUDIOS  
The new locale lacks a little charm but the racing is as fast and frantic as ever.

**MX vs. ATV Alive**  
RAINBOW STUDIOS  
A step backwards for a series that peaked on PS2 and has gotten lamer since.

**RECOMMENDED Need for Speed Hot Pursuit**  
CRITERION GAMES  
Smooth, compelling and absolutely beautiful arcade racing.

**Need For Speed The Run**  
EA BLACK BOX  
A sound concept that's tainted by cruddy handling. Get *Hot Pursuit* instead.

**Nail'd**  
TECHLAND  
Fun knockabout ATV arcade racer.

**RECOMMENDED SHIFT 2: Unleashed**  
SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS  
Incredible sense of speed, frantic racing and plenty of depth. Features Mount Panorama.

**RECOMMENDED Pure**  
BLACK ROCK STUDIOS  
One of the best arcade racers on the market that ought to be really cheap by now.



**RECOMMENDED Race Driver: GRID** 9  
CODEMASTERS  
A born-to-rage racing rebel.

**SBK 2011** 7  
MILESTONE  
Fairly similar to the last one, but with a new Challenge mode and tweaked handling.

**RECOMMENDED Skydrift** 8  
DIGITAL REALITY  
Kart racing meets *Ace Combat*. It's fairly short but thrilling.

**RECOMMENDED Split/Second** 8  
BLACK ROCK STUDIO  
Not as sharp as *Burnout* but it's a true challenger.

**Test Drive Unlimited 2** 7  
EDEN GAMES  
Massive and ambitious but the cars handle like go-karts in glue. Second-rate visuals, too.

**RECOMMENDED WRC 2** 7  
MILESTONE  
Better than last year's but still roughly shod together. The only 'proper' rally out there.

## RPG/ACTION RPG

**Alpha Protocol** 5  
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT  
Great concept, poor execution. Also? Worst male lead ever.

**Ar tonelico Qoga: Knell of Ar Ciel** 7  
GUST  
Defiantly old-school JRPG. One for the fans.

**The Baconing** 6  
HOTHEAD GAMES  
Butchered co-op and crushing difficulty spikes sour the experience.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Disgaea 4: A Promise Unforgotten** 8  
NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE  
Very familiar for fans but still exciting.

**DC Universe Online** 7  
SONY ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT  
Pretty but shallow. It's now free to play online.

**RECOMMENDED Dark Souls** 8  
FROM SOFTWARE  
Brutally, stupidly, gloriously hard.

**Dungeon Siege III** 6  
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT  
Sluggish combat and an arse-backwards upgrade system. Quite pretty, though.

**RECOMMENDED Dragon Age: Origins** 9  
BIOWARE  
As long as it is enthralling. Essential for patient fantasy freaks.

**RECOMMENDED Dragon Age II** 8  
BIOWARE  
Accessible but lacks immersion. One step forward and two steps back from *Origins*.

**ESSENTIAL The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion** 10  
BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS  
Simply put: awesome.



**The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim** 10  
DEVELOPER: BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS  
DISTRIBUTOR: PLAYERS: 1  
"Book holidays, leave your other half and ask someone to take care of your dog; you will need 300+ hours to discover everything this offers, from the varied combat options to the mind-blowing amount of quests. The world is huge. It demands your attention. Give in to it absolutely."

## Load of air

So, you're screaming down the straight at Mugello on a motorbike, doing a couple of hundred kilometres an hour. Pitching into the first right-hander and you're off, sailing through the air. All fine in a videogame, you're back on. However, manufacturer Dainese have an ingenious air bag system activates that crucially limits sideways movement of your skull, and also protects your neck. Can we see this in game, please?



**Hyperdimension Neptunia** 8  
IDEA FACTORY  
A pastiche on modern videogames. Very, very weird JRPG with neat attack strategies.

**ESSENTIAL Fallout 3** 10  
BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS  
It's *Oblivion* in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, and it's utterly brilliant.

**RECOMMENDED Fallout: New Vegas** 8  
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT  
A great ride but you've been on it before.

**RECOMMENDED Final Fantasy XIII** 8  
SQUARE ENIX  
Spellbinding graphics and 50+ hours of action but missing a little magic.

**NEW The Lord of the Rings: War in the North** 7  
SNOWBLIND STUDIOS  
Satisfying but repetitive combat. Best with two *Rings* fans going at it in three-player co-op.

**ESSENTIAL Mass Effect 2** 10  
BIOWARE  
Astonishingly rich combat-driven sci-fi. An action RPG without peer.

**Resonance of Fate** 6  
TRI-ACE  
Deep, but also wordy, clunky and ugly.

**Valkyria Chronicles** 8  
SEGA WDW  
Strategy/RPG heads should not miss this.

**White Knight Chronicles II** 7  
LEVEL 5/JAPAN STUDIO  
A JRPG for those who like to grind.

## SHOOTER

**RECOMMENDED Aliens vs. Predator** 9  
REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS  
One of the best movie-inspired titles ever.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Battlefield 3** 8  
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE  
Single player blows, multiplayer's awesome. Get a team together and own the PSN.

**RECOMMENDED Battlefield: Bad Company** 8  
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE  
Better single player campaign than its sequel.

**RECOMMENDED Battlefield: Bad Company 2** 8  
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE  
A top-tier shooter with a deeply dedicated online community, but the single-player mischief of the original is M.I.A.

**RECOMMENDED BioShock** 8  
IRRATIONAL GAMES / 2K MARIN  
Grown-up gaming at its best.

**RECOMMENDED BioShock 2** 9  
2K MARIN / DIGITAL EXTREMES / 2K AUSTRALIA  
Doesn't match the original's plot but the combat has been spliced to near-perfection.

**Bodycount** 3  
CODEMASTERS  
Fundamentally broken and largely pointless.

**ESSENTIAL Borderlands** 9  
GEARBOX SOFTWARE  
This starts out great and only gets better.

**RECOMMENDED Brother's in Arms: Hell's Highway** 8  
GEARBOX SOFTWARE  
The most authentic WWII shooter ever made.

**Brink** 7  
SPLASH DAMAGE  
Runs a good online race. Faceplants as a solo experience.

**Bulletstorm** 7  
PEOPLE CAN FLY  
Inventive but saves the best stuff for the final couple of hours. Graphically struggles, too.

**Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare** 10  
INFINITY WARD  
It's still relentlessly exciting.

**ESSENTIAL Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2** 10  
INFINITY WARD  
Like three games stuffed into one. We still love the co-op Spec Ops mode.

**NEW RECOMMENDED Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3** 9  
INFINITY WARD  
It realised the threat presented by *Battlefield 3* and sees it off. Refined and addictive.

**RECOMMENDED Call of Duty: Black Ops** 9  
TREYARCH  
A generous package with great solo and online play. The presentation's excellent too.

**ESSENTIAL Call of Duty: World at War** 10  
TREYARCH  
War at its worst (and best). Proof you can make a great WWII game set (partially) in the Pacific. Plus, Nazi Zombies.

**Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood** 7  
TECHLAND  
A cinematic and action-packed Western shooter that's better than you probably think.

**Call of Juarez: The Cartel** 4  
TECHLAND  
Hackneyed ideas with AI from the last century. Dopey multiplayer, too.

**RECOMMENDED The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena** 8  
STARBREEZE STUDIOS / TIGON STUDIOS  
Moody and fresh. A must play. You don't need to know the movies to enjoy it either.

**Condemned 2: Bloodshot** 9  
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS  
Gripping stuff. We were blown away. Shame the original isn't on PS3.

**RECOMMENDED Crysis** 8  
CRYTEK  
Forget it's from 2007 and realise it's stellar. Comes close to shaming the sequel.

**RECOMMENDED Crysis 2** 9  
CRYTEK  
Diabolically pretty and challenging, and a welcome reprieve from corridor shooters.

**RECOMMENDED The Darkness** 9  
STARBREEZE STUDIOS  
Stunning, original and gory as hell. Hopefully the sequel rocks this hard.

**RECOMMENDED Deus Ex: Human Revolution** 8  
EIDOS MONTREAL  
A flawed masterpiece that doesn't offer quite as much choice as you'd like.

**F.E.A.R.** 8  
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS / DAY 1 STUDIOS  
A chilling ride, but a bit ugly now.

**F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin** 7  
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS  
An above-average shooter suffering from a lack of imagination.

**F.E.A.R. 3** 6  
DAY 1 STUDIOS  
Capable but unspectacular. Also, not scary. Better in co-op.

**RECOMMENDED Far Cry 2** 8  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
A technical open-world bell-ringer but the travel time will grate.

**NEW RECOMMENDED GoldenEye 007: Reloaded** 8  
EUROCOM  
A lot of fun, though it's probably lost amongst the glut of other top-tier games.

**Haze** 6  
FREE RADICAL DESIGN  
Patchy visuals, tragic level design and dismal AI.

**Homefront** 8  
KAOS STUDIOS  
Polished but blink-and-you'll-miss-it single player. A fine alternative to CoD multi, though.

**ESSENTIAL Killzone 2** 10  
GUERRILLA GAMES  
Lives up to the hype with hectic action.

**RECOMMENDED Killzone 3** 9  
GUERRILLA GAMES  
Epic firefights and an engrossing storyline.

**RECOMMENDED Medal of Honor** 8  
DANGER CLOSE / DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE  
Not sexy but it's a gritty, realistic shooter with great atmosphere.

**RECOMMENDED Mirror's Edge** 8  
EA DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE  
A true original that makes some grand leaps in design.

**RECOMMENDED Operation Flashpoint: Red River** 8  
CODEMASTERS  
A massive improvement on its predecessor. Fun solo, but co-op over the PSN is awesome.

**RECOMMENDED The Orange Box** 9  
EA UK / VALVE  
Get it for *Portal*, keep it for *Half-Life 2*.

**RECOMMENDED Portal 2** 9  
VALVE  
One of the most brilliant games ever. You'll hold it dear for many years to come, and the split-screen co-op is wicked.

**RAGE** 7  
ID  
Holds promise but struggles in many regards. We hope they make a sequel, and make it what this should have been.

**RECOMMENDED Resistance: Fall of Man** 10  
INSOMNIAC GAMES  
A fantastic launch title with sweet weapons.

**RECOMMENDED Resistance 2** 9  
INSOMNIAC GAMES  
Fast, furious and stuffed with action.

**RECOMMENDED Resistance 3** 8  
INSOMNIAC GAMES  
Derivative action but effortlessly compelling. A grand finale, nonetheless.

**Rogue Warrior** 3  
ZOMBIE STUDIOS / REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS  
A fiasco. We tried to like it but it's too short and too terrible.

**Singularity** 7  
RAVEN SOFTWARE  
Had potential but wasn't quite worth the wait.

**Sniper: Ghost Warrior** 5  
CITY INTERACTIVE  
The novelty will be enough for sniper fans. Everyone else should wait for the sequel.

**TimeShift** 6  
SABER INTERACTIVE  
A sterling attempt that doesn't quite reach 88 miles per hour.

**Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas 2** 7  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
Not as good or as cool as the first one.

**Turning Point: Fall of Liberty** 4  
SPARK UNLIMITED  
Scrappy throughout. Great concept, bogus execution.



## SPORTS

**2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa** 7  
EA CANADA  
FIFA 10 with a World Cup facelift. A bit pricey.

**AFL Live** 6  
BIG ANT  
Does a decent job of things and it's better than *Rugby League Live*.

**Backbreaker** 7  
NATURALMOTION  
Great tech. Worth a look to see euphoria at work in a sports game.

**EA Sports MMA** 7  
EA TIBURON  
Great controls but struggles to be convincing.



**FIFA 12** 8

DEVELOPER: EA CANADA  
PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-22  
"Hardcore fans will love it, though those approaching the series with relatively fresh eyes will scratch their heads. Online, though, it's without peer: you could lose your life to this belter of a game until next year's update."

**RECOMMENDED Fight Night Champion** 9  
EA CANADA  
Refined controls, excellent story mode and super-quick gameplay. Near perfect.

**International Cricket 2010** 7  
TRICKSTAR GAMES  
Not the most comprehensive cricket game but the best when you're on the pitch.

**John Daly's ProStroke Golf** 5  
GUSTO GAMES  
Those looking for a high production value golf game should give this the shaft.

**NEW Move Fitness** 7  
COLDWOODINTERACTIVE  
Surprisingly effective fitness software for those with Move sets.

**RECOMMENDED NBA 2K12** 9  
VISUAL CONCEPTS  
Fans of the sport should buy this immediately.

**RECOMMENDED NBA Jam: On Fire Edition** 8  
EA CANADA  
Loads of fun. For \$20 you're mad not to get it.

**RECOMMENDED Pro Evolution Soccer 2012** 8  
KCET TOKYO  
Hi-octane action (yes, for a football game). It's actually a lot of fun, but it's no *FIFA*.

**NEW PUMA After Hours Athletes** 7  
VARIOUS DEVELOPERS  
Three games in one – bowling, darts and pool – that you've downloaded before.

**Rugby League Live** 5  
BIG ANT  
Not as complete a game as the last one on PS2 and the whack team ratings frustrate.

**Rugby World Cup 2011** 4  
HB STUDIOS  
Near disastrous and fairly pointless.

**Shaun White Skateboarding** 6  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
Kudos for the quirky touches but the skating itself is pretty bland.

**Shaun White Snowboarding** 6  
UBISOFT MONTREAL  
Lacks the fine touch of realism or the excitement of lunacy.

**Skate** 9  
EA BLACK BOX  
A well-balanced masterpiece and true *Tony Hawk* killer. Trumped by its sequels.

**RECOMMENDED Skate 2** 9  
EA BLACK BOX  
One of the greatest sports games ever conceived. Flawless controls are married with a dense city that's packed with natural lines.

**RECOMMENDED Skate 3** 8  
EA BLACK BOX  
Better in many ways, although the city isn't as cool as *Skate 2*.

**RECOMMENDED Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12** 8  
EA TIBURON  
Great golf game but we don't like the way the day one DLC is teased via the career mode.

**Tony Hawk's Project 8** 7  
NEVERSOFTH  
No real reason to revisit this post-*Skate* at all.

**Tony Hawk: RIDE** 4  
ROBOMODO  
Pure frustration made plastic.

**RECOMMENDED Top Spin 4** 8  
2K CZECH  
More accessible than its predecessor with a DualShock, as the Move controls are spotty.

**RECOMMENDED UFC Undisputed 2010** 8  
YUKE'S  
The new undisputed baron of sports fighting.

**RECOMMENDED Virtua Tennis 4** 8  
SUMO DIGITAL  
Superb Move controls and supremely pretty.

## STRATEGY

**RECOMMENDED Civilization Revolution** 8  
FIRAXIS GAMES  
Great fun and shockingly addictive.

**RECOMMENDED From Dust** 9  
UBISOFT MONTPELLIER  
Creative and engaging. Surprisingly likable.

**RECOMMENDED R.U.S.E.** 8  
EUGEN SYSTEMS  
Niche but supremely well-crafted strategy. Better with Move, too.

**The Sims 3** 7  
THE SIMS STUDIO  
Waiting to pounce on the right type of gamer.

**Stormrise** 4  
THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY  
A cack-handed, future war mess.

## infamous

REVISITING PLAYSTATION CLASSICS

1996:  
FORMULA 1

CONSOLE: PLAYSTATION GENRE: RACING DEVELOPER: BIZARRE CREATIONS  
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: UK CURRENT APPROXIMATE PRICE: \$8 ON EBAY



When the original PlayStation was first launched, *Formula 1* was one of Europe's most beloved sports, free of the budget cuts and fleeing audiences that have plagued the world's most technological sport over the last couple of years. What better way to use the immense untapped horsepower of the PlayStation than to create a virtual simulation of this beloved motorsport, and it fell to European developer Psygnosis to do so.

It was the first realistic driving game from the studio behind *WipeOut* and *Destruction Derby*, but any concerns about zero gravity handling fell by the wayside as soon as drivers roared out of pit lane. Borrowing heavily from F1 games that had proved popular on the PC, this was arguably one of the first sim-racers on the consoles, needing a feather-light touch on the throttle to tame these spin-tastic marvels of engineering. The fully 3D cars and tracks were a marvel to behold in an era still dominated by two dimensional sprites, though a small amount of pop up detracted from the overall stellar presentation. There was no detailed cockpit view for hardcore simmers, but the nose cone view made for a more than capable substitute. Car damage was non-existent, but at the time gamers were more than happy with the real time skids left on the track when the back end got a bit scary. The inclusion of post-race replays allowed new

PlayStation owners to savour the visuals being powered by the amazing grey box of technology hidden under the tellie.

Especially memorable was Murray Walker's enthusiastic commentary, recorded in pristine CD quality audio, another technological breakthrough for the genre. His dulcet tones were backed up by two of the era's most popular rock and rollers – Steve Vai and Joe Satriani – a far cry from the electronica that features in most of today's titles.

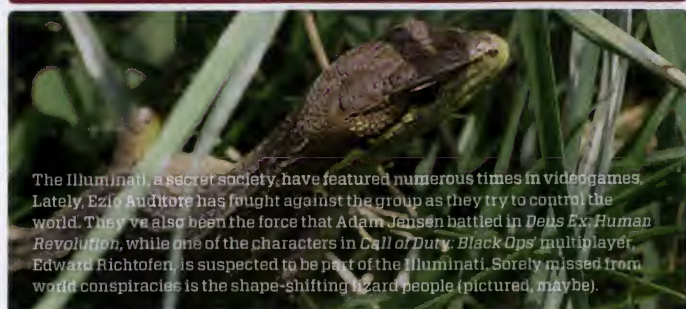
Like today's F1 games, the heart of the experience was a lengthy 17 race season, with a special bonus track in the shape of an F1 car unlocked upon successful completion. Back then Adelaide still played host to the Aussie leg of the season, and the track was faithfully recreated, though the lack of graphical detail made it hard to pick out the serial killers in the screaming audiences. Split screen racing was included for couch competitors, while system link allowed two players to drag TVs into the living room for their own weekend of racing.

Watching replays of the game on YouTube it's easy to see the influence this game still has to this day, with the TV-inspired interface still copied by *F1 2011*. It turned out to be one of the most successful franchises of the PS1 and PS2 era, inspiring thirteen sequels over a ten year period. With *F1 2010* taking up the mantle last year, we've now got another amazing F1 game to play, but it's still the first *Formula 1* that sits atop the podium in older racers' hearts.

## BOXOUT NEEDS TO BE WRITTEN

*Formula 1* was the first of Sony's official FIA-licensed *Formula 1* games. All the cars, teams and circuits of the 1995 season were recreated in millimetric detail. Variable game modes and camera angles (!) were included. To widen the game's appeal a bit more, it included optional helpers such as automatic braking. The game supported a variety of PlayStation tech, including the ill-fated NeGcon Joypad and you could use a Link Cable and two tellys to race a mate. About seven people actually did that, too.

## New world order



The Illuminati, a secret society, have featured numerous times in video games. Lately, Ezio Auditore has fought against the group as they try to control the world. They've also been the force that Adam Jensen battled in *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, while one of the characters in *Call of Duty: Black Ops* multiplayer, Edward Richtofen, is suspected to be part of the Illuminati. Sorely missed from world conspiracies is the shape-shifting lizard people (pictured, maybe).



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